



The  
Harvest-Home

Audrey  
Langstroop











THE  
HARVESTERS

BY  
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TO  
E. V. L.



# THE HARVESTERS



# THE HARVESTERS

## I

THE brazen notes of the Great Tom were telling the townspeople of Oxford that the hour was nine, and warning the university watchmen to close the gates. One hundred and one strokes this bell nightly tolled, in honor of the original number of students, but it is doubtful if its brass throat ever fought more vainly against the elements than on the 18th of November in the year 1800.

There was no need to fear the proctors on such a night, for those who ventured forth were on weightier business than the maintenance of order. The wind, sweeping down High Street, swayed the church-bells until their notes chimed with the Tom. The cloaks of pedestrians flapped behind, like fluttering flags, or stood out before, like the bellied sails of some hard-pressed sloop, and over all hissed a biting rain. At the intersection of High and South streets two currents of

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air crossed and shivered lances, until the thoroughfares were curtained with mist.

Light there was not, because no link could live in such weather, and the wayfarers, stumbling into the puddles, cursed and proceeded as best they might. However, the tavern-keepers rejoiced because my lord, with his coach-and-four, or six, must pass the night in Oxford, since to go on would be but to risk the sturdiest of axles and incur the torment of a night passed in such comfort as the defection of one's carriage in a lonely, thief-infested road would allow. By half after eight not a bed was to be had in the town, and the last arrivals to be accommodated were taken in at the Star and Garter, in Castle Street, where the best rooms had been left vacant by the non-arrival of my lord of Rurbeck, for whom they had been reserved. Rumor had it that his lordship was fast in the ruts between Buckingham and Oxford.

The travellers who benefited thereby were two ladies, the younger of such surpassing beauty and evident innocence that the nobleman should have waived his right in any event. The elder was quite well enough known to the members of the *ton* to desire that her stay in Oxford be as unheralded as possible. So well and so unfavorably known was Mrs. Fortescue that none stood higher in the regard of George Frederick, Prince of Wales.

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This *grande dame* sat yawning by the fire on the hearth of The Blue Tuft, a chamber overlooking Castle Street, reflecting upon the misfortune of being forced to travel with a chit of a girl who could play neither macao, whist, nor piquet, who could gossip of no one, because of knowing no one, and who looked askance at a snuff-spoon. From time to time Mrs Fortescue threw angry glances in the direction of the girl, who stood by the window, her russet hair laved in the firelight; but this was an occasion wherein diplomacy alone prospected success, so madame pressed her thin lips tightly together and held her peace. The dame had desired to pass through Oxford in haste because of a young man—a friend of the girl's family—who had once been interested in her charge.

"You don't know how wonderful all this seems to me," said the young woman, turning, with a queer little laugh.

Mrs. Fortescue looked into the dancing blue eyes and smiled a smile of gratification and compassion.

"It is very commonplace," she said.

"Oh, to you—yes! But to me it—it means everything I've longed for. It seems a godsend."

"I dare say your life was not very happy at Ashley," said the woman. "Your father will

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broaden out in London. The parish Sir Collyn has secured for him will present opportunities he has never conceived. A clergyman is buried in the country."

"Oh, you can't imagine it!" the girl fervently exclaimed. "The days that were like months, and each just like every other one. Nothing but flowers, sick folk, and prayers. I'm afraid I am not very pious."

Mrs. Fortescue laughed softly.

"I'm afraid I'm not, indeed—not as much as father wishes; but the Broughtons used to lend me their copies of *The Gentleman's Magazine*. Sometimes they were years old when I got them, but I devoured them, and cried over them like a little baby. It was like *Gulliver's Travels* would be to you—a new world."

The dame coughed.

"I remember father caught me reading an account of a mask at Mrs. Cornellys'. He was furious because it spoke of a character dressed as Adam. I think he deemed it a profanation, and he preached with that as a text the following Sunday."

"I remember the costume; it was quite memorable," dryly remarked Mrs. Fortescue.

"But that was years ago—1776."

"So you see I'm not ashamed of my age. Mrs. Cornellys is quite out of the fashion now,

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if, indeed, she is not dead. After her came the Pantheon, in Oxford Street. Now 'tis Willis's Rooms, in St. James's."

"But I suppose I shall be forbidden to go, quite the same," said the young lady, mournfully, "so there is little use hoping."

"Pshaw!" the old dame observed. "You'll not know your father for the same man once he is in town. Country graveyards are not healthy environments. This is a great chance, and he is no fool, m' dear. Sir Collyn has a deal of influence. Your father could not have a better patron."

"But why should Sir Collyn be interested in us? He is, I know; but he knows so little of us, and so many would rejoice in such a preferment as Aldersgate."

"Sir Collyn is impressionable; it runs in all the Temples. Mayhap your own pretty cheeks—"

"Ah, no!" exclaimed the girl. "Thank you, but no."

"Why not?" queried the woman, tapping with her snuff-spoon against the chair-arm. "I hear there have been many. I hear there is one right in this town."

The color mounted to the young woman's brow as she laughingly disclaimed, and Mrs. Fortescue's thin lips grew a trifle more tender.

"That was years ago, if—if ever," the girl

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was saying. "We were children. All children play. Now we're only acquaintances. I was a princess then—the 'Princess Osra.' Now the tables are turned, and I am the daughter of a country curate, while he is an earl's son."

"And a very bad sort, from what I understand, my dear. Young men are even wilder now than they were in my day," said Mrs. Fortescue. "I want to speak to you about this gentleman. You know, my dear, your father intrusted you to me only after I had most earnestly promised to care well for you. I experienced a deal of difficulty, I do assure you, in convincing him that it was best for you to go first to London and arrange the house for his occupancy, and, had it not been for my efforts, you would probably have remained at Ashley for several months. It was your father's original intention to bring you up to town only after he had 'investigated,' as he put it, the 'environment.' So you see, in his eyes at least, I have undertaken a very serious responsibility."

"I am sorry, madame, if I am a burden."

"Not at all, child. Leastwise, not as yet; but I have gathered from your conversation in the coach that you look forward with a deal of pleasure to meeting this Baxcombe again. You do, do you not?"

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"It would be strange were it otherwise, madame," replied the girl, a new note in her voice. "The Broughtons and the Baxcombes are the leading gentry in our vicinity, and, as you know, my father, until very recently, was curate to the Earl of Tweeddale, the Hon. Mr. Baxcombe's father. We owe them much in gratitude, and our country life has bred a mixed friendship which, mayhap, would not be possible in the city. I am sure my father would wish me to shake hands with Donald, and would think it unseemly—nay, rude—did we not meet and we both in the same town."

"All the same, my dear, I prefer that you do not. What was perfectly proper while you were with your father might be most improperly viewed while you are with me," quietly argued the old hypocrite. "I have perfect confidence in you—"

"I am glad to hear you say so, madame," the young woman interrupted, in a tone which brought a covert glance from Mrs. Fortescue.

"Perfect confidence," she continued, evenly. "But by repute—and I own that repute is often wrong—this young man is not the type of person I should choose as an associate for a young lady in my charge. Of course, my dear," she interposed, at sight of the girl's flashing eyes, "my position is quite honorary. I

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have no actual authority to force any restrictions upon you, but I sincerely hope that, out of respect for my counsel, you will heed what I have said."

"Do you really know anything against Mr. Baxcombe, madame?"

"Not in the sense of being able to prove things before the Assizes," tartly responded the old woman. "In that sense I don't know that my lord of Grafton ran away with Lady Hatton. I was not actually present when the thing occurred, but Sir Roland Hatton says so, and society says it, so I believe. It is the custom to believe what is known to the world."

"Is Mr. Baxcombe supposed to have run away with some one?"

"My dear," Mrs. Fortescue replied, more blandly, "we sha'n't quarrel. I have pointed out what I think is the proper course of behavior. If you do not choose to follow it, I am helpless."

"I don't see that it is improper for me to greet an old friend, whose father is my father's oldest friend; and I am sure, madame, that a Starke need never fear hurt from a Baxcombe. If there is aught of impropriety in it, Donald will be the first to make me aware of it, and I know both the Earl and papa would take it

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hard did we not meet. Besides, I have already despatched a note to Brasenose College asking Mr. Baxcombe to call."

"My dear child, you don't mean to say that you were bold enough to ask a man to call upon you without consulting me? 'Pon my soul! Unless he's a ploughman, he'll think you have the manners of a--of a--"

"He is quite aware of my deficiencies, madame," said Miss Starke, head erect and blue eyes aflame. "He has known them from boyhood. They are many, but they do not spring from a chilled heart and a willingness to believe my friends as others would have them."

"Very well, miss," austerely said the dame. "Please be in readiness to take the road at sunrise."

"I scarcely think I shall be," said the girl, with that dangerous sweetness which warring women love.

Mrs. Fortescue cackled harshly. "Would you like me to leave you?" she asked.

A fugitive light of fear glinted in the eyes of the girl, who knew not how impossible was such a course.

"And it pleasure you," she presently replied.

"You well know I may not," said the old

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woman, nervously tapping the floor with her walking-staff. "When will you be ready, then?"

The girl swallowed, and raised her eyes.  
"When you wish," she said, softly.

## II

ALL night the storm raged, and the dull light of morning showed streets that ran like rivulets and roads that were bogs. My lord of Rurbeck turned into Castle Street drenched to the skin and half frozen, his postilions whimpering and with chattering teeth, his horses splashed to the withers, and his coach a monstrosity in mud. His lordship would not hear of the ladies vacating the rooms, and vowed that such weather was enough to prove the death of a sheep-dog; instead, mine host was driven to a pallet by his kitchen fire, while my lord warmed his blood with a glass or two of port in mine host's chamber. Clearly, travel was impossible; not even the mail-coaches were getting through. His lordship told of a poor, lone express-rider whom he passed, mounted on a broad-chested plough-horse, and bound north as though the devil himself were at his heels; but that was all, not another soul was abroad on the highway.

It was the guinea in his pocket and a supply

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of guineas to use as bribes on the other relays, not the devil, which prompted the hardy post-boy to brave the elements. By travelling northwest from Oxford, through Leamington and Stafford, one reaches the little hamlet of Ashley. It is a matter of well over a hundred miles, and on such a day must have seemed ten times that; but in the post-rider's leather wallet lay a letter, addressed to the Earl of Tweeddale, which discounted every hardship. It ran:

“MY LORD,—Your affectionate post-express came to hand yesterday. You speak of a preferment secured for our old curate, John Starke, by a man named Temple, and say further that sweet, impetuous Hattie is being convoyed to town by a Mrs. Fortescue, whom you describe as ‘a most estimable lady.’ I make haste to correct that impression, and to supply you with some facts concerning these precious two which are generally known in town and only fail of being known to my respected parent by reason of his love for things rural rather than urban.

“First, then, as to this Sir Collyn Temple, whose generosity is the more suspicious because not a motive can be descried save the one motive which his repute as an agent of Prince George supplies. The man has been hounded from White’s, Brooks’s, and even from D’Aubigny’s, and is socially ostracized because of well-directed surmises as to the channel of his income, as well as of his baronetcy. Nothing has been proven against him because it were dangerous to attempt to prove so much with his royal Highness secondarily involved.

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"This Mrs. Fortescue is known to be in the same avocation, if avocation it may be called. However 'estimable' she may appear, it is certain that the true purport of this whole business would be apparent to the first man-about-town who saw Hattie in her company. It was this same woman who figured, three years ago, in the Bullock's Chocolate Rooms affair, which reduced the family altar of the Taylors to ashes.

"I beg you to realize that this preferment is a delusion, or, if not that, has existence only after an acquiescence which no father could honorably give, and which good John Starke would spurn.

"That he has actually permitted his daughter to take the road with a woman who must be unknown to you, no matter how godly she may have appeared, upon so specious a plea as you have set forth, astounds me. 'Fore Gad! what preparation needs an humble parsonage like this one—a matter of five rooms and a scullery? The persuasiveness of these two schemers must indeed be eloquent, but the mistake is freighted with peril.

"You may rely upon it that I shall accord them 'a warm reception,' and, by fair means or foul, I shall keep Miss Starke and, if possible, the woman in Oxford until the curate comes up, which he must do in the direst haste. If this storm continues another day the roads will be impassable to all save the sturdiest horsemen, so my part will not be difficult.

"From the tenor of your letter I have it that Temple is still at the Corbett Arms. It were useless to attempt his arrest, but a rawhide would meet the exigency. My only fear is that Hattie's impulsive temperament will defy my conclusions.

"Now, my lord, for the only part of this epistle devoted to my own affairs: I grieve to tell my dear

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parent that his worst and, alas! all too accurate fears are realized. As a result of a supper-party held t'other night in Blackton's rooms, at Christ Church, at which a certain play-actress appeared, we were, all of us—Blackton, Claypole, Charleroy, Barret, and I—hauled up before the dean and broken. I do assure you that the punishment was out of all accord with the gravity of the offence, but there is no help for it, and I am, even now, engaged in packing my boxes preparatory to leaving Oxford. We were, it is true, somewhat in wine, but did nothing disgraceful, 'pon my honor.

"I hope by rendering my best services to Miss Starke to in some degree palliate my wrong-doing and thus to merit your consideration. It is impossible for me to otherwise show my deep sense of my own obliquity.

"Hoping that this will find your lordship in full possession of that excellent health which, saving the gout, is your lordship's good-fortune, I beg to sign myself,

"Your most respectful, obedient, and repentant son,  
"DONALD.

"BRASENOSE COLLEGE, OXFORD, November 19, 1800.  
"To the Earl of Tweeddale, Baxcombe Hall, Ashley,  
Staffs."

Having despatched this letter, the Honorable Donald threw himself into an arm-chair and bade his servant uncork a flask of Ruinart, and to lay out his second-best frock of blue broadcloth, the yellow waistcoat, and nankeen breeches.

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As he sipped the wine he took rapid summary of the past, which seemed but yesterday, when he and the girl whose protector he was to be played under the willows by the brook-side, in the family park. The perfume of her note reminded him of the wild violets she used to love and with which he weaved wreaths to place about her soft hair as he knelt and called her "Princess—the Princess Osra," of a realm the farthest boundary of which was the sky-line, and its wars their petty squabbles over the destinies of captured butterflies. She was a pretty child, he remembered, with tendrils of blue showing against her temples, and eyes which, though they could plead for the butterflies, could also flash in girlish rage. Years had passed since then, and the two, as it happened, never met, he being at school and college and she busied with the homely cares of house-keeping. He wondered what changes those years had wrought. Despite his endeavor to picture her as the little girl grown up, he could conceive nothing which did not resolve itself into the ordinary bucolic lass. Yet he could scarce believe it. There was something about the child which bade fair to make a noble woman and an attractive one.

"Hif your 'onor pleases, will your 'onor show me 'ow to pack these 'ere swords hand plastruns

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hand things?" sighed the servant, gazing ruefully at the pile that confronted him.

"You may dress me. I am going out," responded his master.

"Hi tell you, sir," whimpered the man, as he drew on the Honorable Donald's superb boots, "hit 'll be ha precious long toime afore Hi gets hanother marster loike you, sir. Lor bless you! You can see your face hin them boots, you can that. Look hat 'em, sir, now! Hit's hall hin the wine hand the polishing; hand 'ow many young gents his there wot gives their boots the syme stuff they puts hin their mouths? 'Ow many shines 'em with stuff 'at costs ten bob ha—"

"Parsons, how often have I told you—"

"Hi know, sir; but 'ow many do, sir, has ha fact?" blubbered the fellow. "Five bottle this dye, three for your 'onor hand two for them boots."

"Hand 'e tykes 'is glarss loike ha lord, 'e does," murmured Parsons, when his master had set forth for the Star and Garter. "Many's the toime Hi've seen 'im drink hall the gentlemen hunder the tyble, hand then 'e walks hout has steady has you please; ha bit cracked in the 'ead, Hi know, but 'is heyes that foine, hand nary ha blotch. Mister Donald's ha marster has you don't see many hof."

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The aristocratic was the dominant note in Mr. Baxcombe. There was a quiet dignity about the lad which made tradesmen speak softly, even when pressing their accounts.

As he walked down High Street the sight of faces with which he was familiar and places in which he had often figured wrung his heart. Few have known Oxford not to love it, and to Baxcombe the quaint town was a passion. To part from it at all would be racking enough, but to quit it in disgrace, without prospect of ever again sharing in its joys, was anguishing. He stopped at a tavern for another flask of Ruinart. When he came out not a line of his face was altered, but the pain had gone, and the tone of the college bells had changed to one of merriment. The rain lashed his face and the wind played havoc with his flounced cape coat, but the sense of despair had given way to exhilaration.

How should he treat this girl? What treatment did she expect? The old roguish impiousness might have survived, in which case she would still be the "Princess Osra." He half hoped he would find things so, for the fiction would still please.

The uncertainty lent quite a spice as he was ushered into the Blue Tuft, and extended his hand—to vacancy. A little ormolu clock

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ticked on the mantel and an odor of perfume hovered in the air. Laughing softly, he stepped to the window-seat and picked up a netted purse, nearing completion, across the face of which danced a couple of merry ladies beneath the shade of sprawling trees; on the obverse was a verse:

"You'll mend your life to-morrow, still you cry.  
In what far country does to-morrow lie?  
It stays so long, is fetched so far, I fear  
'Twill prove both very old and very dear."

The clock ticked on and his smiles turned to frowns of impatience. Then his ear caught the swishing of skirts, and he arose with a foolishly beating heart. Indeed, what folly it was, and this a country bumpkin, doubtless! His eyes watched the portières, and when they were drawn back by the girl's arms, white in their half-sleeves, he sharply caught his breath and bent forward. For a moment she paused, as though surprised, and then swept gracefully towards him with a smile of welcome. His fingers closed about hers, but he did not stoop to kiss the tips; and they said that no man in Oxford could do it half so well. Instead, he gazed straight into her eyes.

"And this is the little Princess Osra of the happy days?"

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A wave of color swept to her brow, for she had wondered how much would be remembered. The blush faded, and he thought how absurd this was, still holding her hand.

"That was a game," she said, prettily, withdrawing her fingers, "a childish game, and one I thought you had forgotten."

"Did you forget?" he asked, quickly.

"Mrs. Fortescue will be here in a moment," she said, sinking into a chair with a natural grace unequalled at St. James's—and he had expected rusticity! "I want you to meet her. She has been so kind to me. I dare say you have heard the wonderful news?"

"By express from the Earl."

"And did he tell you to look after me?"

"Needed I that?"

"Then he did. I am glad, because—because—"

"Because?" he said, archly.

"Because Mrs. Fortescue seemed to think it was improper for me to write you."

"I should have come, in any event."

"She doesn't seem to approve you altogether, I'm afraid," the girl impulsively added, "but I do—at least, I did."

"If I am not mistaken," the Honorable Donald was saying, a moment later, to Mrs. Fortescue, "I have had the honor of meeting madame previously."

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"It is possible," she replied, with a glance that proclaimed a willingness for war, if war it was to be.

"Naturally my recollection of madame exceeds madame's of me. Again, if I am not mistaken, madame is connected with the Fortescues of Yorkshire, whom I had the pleasure of meeting at Stote Hall, in Northumberland."

"No," said the woman, somewhat mollified. "I am of the Kent branch by marriage and am Sussex-born myself."

Under Mr. Baxcombe's graceful tongue the old dame was speedily won over to the belief that this was quite a well-mannered and harmless young man. The prime necessity for quitting the town in haste—the danger of interference in Mrs. Fortescue's plans—no longer seemed to exist; and so it came to pass, the weather continuing heavy, that innocent sight-seeing excursions were arranged, from which Mrs. Fortescue excused herself on the plea of ill-health. Hackney-coaches were essential, and hackney-coaches were snug conveyances. What wonder, then, that the atmosphere was electrically charged as from a second heaven!

### III

THE first of these journeys centred about the ancient college of Brasenose, which had known and disowned Mr. Baxcombe, who explained the tradition according to which the college derives its name from a corruption of *brasinum*, or *brasinhus*, "as having been originally located in that part of the royal mansion (of Alfred the Great) devoted to a brewery."

Miss Starke listened, but was more attracted by the gold tassels adorning the caps of two noblemen on their way to lunch. Not that she was other than taken with the gallant gentleman by her side, but the moral courage which had supported her in triumph through the ordeal of their meeting was fast oozing under the warmth of his glances, and a growing realization on her part that however much she may have remained the Princess Osra, he was certainly a different type of being from the little boy she had then known. Fascinating he was, and as deferential as the most particular of

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princesses could desire, but she felt piqued that he could be so monstrously assured of her.

Mr. Baxcombe, for his part, was pleased to be noted as the escort of a young woman whose cheeks were emblematic of the War of the Roses and whose chin bore the St. James's tilt. To deposit this girl in a hackney-coach was like relinquishing a bouquet, while to assist her to alight was to restrain a sudden longing to clasp her in his arms.

"And what do you think of this change in your fortunes?" he inquired, as they bowled towards Christ Church.

"I don't know what to think; I wander from one extreme to the other. One moment it is everything I have ever desired, and another moment—I don't know, the bottom falls out, and I am miserable."

"What does your father think? Strange he did not come with you."

"There are so many things to be done. He has to straighten out his papers, and, of course, the house in London has to be prepared; so Mrs. Fortescue suggested that I go up with her and attend to that."

"Where did you meet Mrs. Fortescue?"

"She was staying in Stafford, and Sir Collyn, who is a friend of hers, asked her to drive over and talk with me about what was needed in

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the way of preparation. She did, and then told us she was going up to town."

Baxcombe stared stolidly to the fore.

"I wish I had waited—sometimes."

"Why?"

"I suppose it is both foolish and childish, but the nearer I get to London the more lonely I feel. I have never been away before, or I wouldn't be so silly."

"I don't think you silly," he said; "and you are not silly. What objections to me did this wo—this Mrs. Fortescue advance?"

"What does it signify?" she asked, blushing prettily. "They were not good objections, so I overruled them."

He smiled despite himself.

"I am quite proof against such criticism. I dare say they were based upon my being broken."

"Broken?" she interrogated.

"Expelled. Don't you know they have broken me?"

She shook her head.

"Why?"

"This time it does not signify."

"It does," the girl exclaimed. "I want to know. Tell me why."

"Do you care?" he asked.

"I want to know."

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“Why should you know?”

“They expel men for crimes. I can’t believe you were guilty of any such. I know only a little bit about you, but I know enough for that.”

“We have no crime at Oxford,” he said; “at least, not in the gown—dissipation, folly, deviltry, mayhap, but not crime.”

“Mrs. Fortescue said you were dissipated. I told her you were not.”

“You erred,” he said, coldly. “I have been very dissipated—reckless, too. This morning I picked up a purse you are making. Upon the back is a little verse which applies very well to me—so well, it might be intention.”

“The purse is for young Mr. Broughton.”

“At least the moral is mine. I shall try to take it to heart.”

“What are you going to do now? Are you going home?”

“Yes,” he replied, gritting his teeth.

The rain slashed the windows.

“I thought that in going home I would again come under the influence of the Princess Osra. Hers was a good influence.”

“You were too young to know.”

“I was not too young to feel,” he gently said, “nor am I now.”

His hand crept to hers and hers crept away.

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"A man should not rely upon a woman's influence," she said, softly. "His strength should come from within."

"And if it does not?"

"Then he is not much of a man."

The coach lurched and stopped; without a word he assisted her to alight, and they passed the Christ Church portal. Another half an hour saw them again in Castle Street.

"May I come to-morrow morning?" he begged.

"If we are here."

"You must be here," he said, starting. "You must not go without telling me."

The girl laughed in a pretty, tantalizing way.

"It rests with the gods and Mrs. Fortescue."

"It must rest with you," he declared. "You overruled once, you must do so again. Promise me you will. Promise to let me know, at least. You promise?"

She nodded, still laughing.

"I shall come to-morrow morning unless I hear from you in the meanwhile."

"I have not given you permission," she said, tripping up the stairs.

"I shall not wait for it," he called after her; and by way of answer a red rose splashed over the rail and fell at his feet.

Again he stopped at the tavern for a flask of his favorite vintage, and the wine fired his

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veins. To him alcohol was a merciless stimulant—never a narcotic—perverting the reason, but never the legs. Things began to assume a roseate hue, pink cheeks grew more pink and lips more alluring.

Parsons, to whom certain faint signs were familiar, smiled to himself as he served his master's dinner that evening. It was a happy lot, to Parsons' mind, to be able to indulge a cultured taste in intoxicants. As Mr. Baxcombe, a trifle pale, but otherwise his outer self, opened a little packet by his plate, a netted purse tumbled out; with it was a brief—

“Please accept the purse along with the moral.  
“H. S.”

He smiled, then frowned, in indecision.

“In what far country does to-morrow lie?” taunted the token.

He passed his hand over his eyes, touched the purse to his lips, and pulled the bell-rope.

“Take it away, Parsons.”

“Hi beg pardon, sir?”

“Take it away,” his master repeated, motioning to the flask and glass.

“You don't want hit, sir?”

“Demn your stupidity, no!” roared Mr. Baxcombe, and the wondering Parsons gathered nectar unto himself.

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But with the wine gone, realization of his position dawned again. To be broken was not so much of itself, and the sin of the supper-party lay largely in the detection; but to be cut off from the benefits of the university at a time when its classical training was inspiring was an evil indeed. He laughed bitterly and crossed to the window.

"I dare say I could make a living with my brush," he said, grimly. "I've got the artist in me if I only can persuade it to out."

The wind and rain had subsided and a yellow fog hung over spire, steeple, and battlement. A bell crashed forth, and the brazen note lingered on the air. The hour was nine. It was no great task to imagine the smoky lane some dank cloister and the Tom the call to prayers. Oxford! It was a place apart from the world—a holy spot, where tradition was law, and grimy turrets were beloved in their dirt of ages. And, for a bit of folly, it had cast him out!

Irresolutely he wandered to his easy-chair and fingered a copy of *The Gentleman's Magazine*, until the headline,

"LOVE CURED BY PHYSIC,"

arrested his attention. The article was an extract from *Huetiana*. It ran:

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“Love is not only a passion of the soul, like hatred and envy, but it is also a distemper of the body, like a fever. It is in the blood and in the spirits, which are fired and agitated in an extraordinary manner, and it may be treated methodically by the rules of medicine in order to cure it. I am of the opinion that the cure may be wrought by profuse sweats and copious bleedings, which, carrying off those inflamed spirits, may clear the blood, calm its emotions, and re-establish it in its natural state. This is not mere conjecture; it is a notion founded on experience. A great prince, within our memory, who was passionately enamoured with a lady of great merit, was obliged to repair to the army. During his absence his passion was cherished by recollection and by a very frequent and regular correspondence by letters until the end of the campaign, when a dangerous illness reduced him to the last extremity. Remedies were proportioned to the disorder, and the most efficacious means that medicine prescribes were put into practice. He recovered his health, but without recovering his love, which such great evacuations had carried away without his knowledge. For persuading himself that he was still in love, but being so only in idea, he found himself frigid and dispassionate to her whom he thought he still loved. The same thing happened to an intimate friend of mine who, having been cured of a long and stubborn fever by a kind of crisis which consisted of sweat, found himself at the same time cured of a troublesome and inconvenient passion with which he had been long tormented; so that, after his cure, attempting to renew the same train of gallantry, he no longer perceived his former ardors, and was astonished to find in himself only indifference and languor instead of his wonted vivacity and tenderness.”

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As the book slipped from his fingers he smiled to the crackling logs.

"Would it be an inconvenient passion," he murmured, "or a troublesome one?"

Then, throwing back his head, he laughed out loud.

"'Tis a tonic, young sir, better than all the pharmacœpia."

"Heigh-ho!" he exclaimed, rising. "Is it you, Tyne? Lud! How many years has it been?"

"I know not, Mr. Baxcombe, sir," replied the cleric, stout and of jovial mien, "and I cannot take time from such a moment to contemplate. 'Tis good to clasp your hand again, sir. It has been months, not years, young sir, come to it, yet they have seemed years indeed."

"What brought you to this vicinity?"

"Good sir, my legs," laughed Tyne, as he dropped into an easy-chair. "As usual, I am fleeing from the Red Jackets—a matter of twenty-three pounds ten and six, and I could bethink me of no better haven of refuge."

"The exchequer is low."

"Mr. Baxcombe, sir!" declared the parson, in mock dismay. "Fie, sir! And I have not been with you three minutes! You do me wrong, in-

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deed. In an hour, mayhap; but in three minutes—never!"

The man's high spirits were infectious.

"And you, sir; how are you? The same unregenerate—women, wine, and song? Or has some good angel claimed you? I' faith, sir, I believe 'tis so."

"Tempted, rather, Tyne. St. Anthony was tempted, you know. I have been reading here that one may now fall in love with impunity, for to fall out again is a mere matter of calomel. Gad! a boon!"

Chuckling, the cleric accepted the magazine from Baxcombe and adjusted his specs.

"Dear, dear!" he murmured. "There'll soon be no end to it. In twenty-five years there'll be no Dissenters, sir. We'll just give each truant a little pill—but, Lud! sir, this man knew no more of love than yonder fire-dog. Who ever heard of arguing with red lips or pondering a pretty ankle? There's more philosophy in one kiss than in all his reasoning. But, Mr. Baxcombe, sir, can we not—I have such fond recollections—can we not make 'the lass an excuse for the glass,' sir?"

The merriest of twinkles glinted in Tyne's eyes and an answering light sprang to Baxcombe's.

"What shall it be?" he asked, quickly.

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“Ah!” exclaimed the cleric. “What is there like arrack when the chill’s in one’s bones?”

A moment later Parsons inquired, “Did you ring, sir?”

“Yes,” cried his master. “Fetch us two bowls of arrack.”

## IV

THE cheeks of the young woman, speeding to her room, were as red as the rose she had dropped over the stair-rail. Her heart was full and her eyes sparkled from sheer joy. Yet, as she untwined her neckerchief, so carelessly as to tear the lace, she said:

“Men talk so and do not mean it. I am building a castle in Spain.”

But this man—this castle?

On descending to The Blue Tuft the purse attracted her attention, and her needles clicked the remaining rows. When it was done she despatched it by one of the tavern servants, and was about to lapse into reverie again when Mrs. Fortescue’s maid presented madame’s compliments and begged Miss Starke’s presence in madame’s room.

Earlier in the day the old dame had been dismayed by the receipt of a visiting-card, elegantly bordered with lace, bearing the inscription:

“SIR ANTHONY LECKSHIRE, BART.,  
THE GOLDEN CROSS, LONDON.”

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On the left-hand lower corner were the words  
“*pour l'amour.*”

Sir Anthony and Mrs. Fortescue were known to each other by repute, and since she was well past the romantic age, it was evident that the card was by way of acquaintance with Miss Starke. The baronet's taking impudence was a byword in town, and Mrs. Fortescue well knew that he was capable of wrecking her plans. There was nothing for it, then, but to quit Oxford at once, and it was to announce her determination to take the road the following afternoon, by which time the highways would be passable, that she summoned Miss Starke. No valid objection could be interposed, so, with satisfaction to one side and misery to the other, arrangements were made, and of these not the least was the young woman's intimation to Baxcombe of the change of plan. Her note arrived at Brasenose while the Honorable Donald and Tyne, surrounded by empty champagne flasks—for wine had succeeded the arrack—were playing piquet. Baxcombe cursed savagely while reading the news.

“Come!” said the parson. “Quatorze.”

“Mind your own affairs!”

“Oho! he! he!” laughed Tyne, whose cheeks were scarlet. “A thousand pardons, Mr. Bax-

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combe, sir. I've just caught the scent from the sachet."

"Play!" snapped the young man.

For several minutes the cards flipped against the table, with the players mute.

"The last is mine," said Baxcombe, finally. "That's two."

"Referring to your idea of marrying," said the cleric during the deal, "it all depends on why you are marrying. There are many good and many bad reasons. If it's because of a pretty face, why, there are many pretty faces without it."

"What better reason is there in the world than love?" said Baxcombe, who was more under the influence of wine than the parson had ever seen him. "The pretty face is the reward, not the cause, of love. Men love deeper than that."

"Ay — sometimes," drawled Tyne. "Those are the happy marriages. Take a man of the world, like yourself, Mr. Baxcombe. If your ménage is like scores of others, you simply pay double way; that is loss, not benefit. If yours is the ideal ménage, you reap domesticity, and that means the scarification of all you have been doing. Would you take to it, sir? I fear not, Mr. Baxcombe. A man is ready for his own hearthstone only after he has sounded the world outside."

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“Confound your fears!” growled the Honorable Donald, drawing three cards from the stock. “I tell you, Tyne, the one thing I need is a sweet woman to lift me out of this slough and make it all worth while. This girl is the sweetest thing God ever made, and the prettiest. I’ve a mind to do it, Tyne, sink me if I haven’t.”

“Egad!” called the parson. “I’ve repique. Here’s the sequence in hearts, *huitième*; you can’t score above me there. Four kings are fourteen, and that makes thirty-two.”

The Honorable Donald cursed and ordered up two more quart flasks, with the result that the cleric’s cheeks grew yet more rosy.

“You should be sympathetic enough; she’s a daughter of the cloth.”

“No?” chuckled Tyne. “Dear, how we mate to extremes!”

“And her note tells me that I have just fifteen hours in which to decide.”

“Ah! But then there are countless hours in which to revoke.”

“By means of calomel and the divorce court, eh? ’Fore Gad! I’ll know myself first, Tyne.”

“The divorce court, sir? How can that be? Under the act, banns must be published, unless you hie to Gretna, and, I dare say, the roads will

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tag you there. There is no marriage instanter nowadays, and a good thing 'tis. Many a young fellow has repented at leisure and never married."

"The act, you say? Bah! My man, there's no act where there's no ill will. The government never prosecutes unless egged on. Demn the banns. We don't need them. All we need is the one word from her pretty lips, and, demme, I'll fetch it there! I can, Tyne, and I've a mind to, mark me."

"You'll have trouble in finding a clergyman, sir. Know you 'tis a penal offence?"

"Drivel!" declared Mr. Baxcombe. "There's a summons before every jail, and there'd be no summons. As for finding a clergyman! Lud! If I had my walking-stick with me I could dig him in the ribs."

The parson laughed jovially.

"Not me, Mr. Baxcombe. Oh, dear me, no! I've quite exercise enough running from the Jackets. I've no desire to take on the other men."

"What!" shouted the Honorable Donald, throwing down his cards. "You'll not? You'll drink my wine and smoke my best Virginia, but you won't marry me? Why, demme, it's an honor, sir, and you should be proud! Oh, come now, Tyne, you'll not play me a scurvy trick like

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that? I'll not believe it of you; 'pon honor I won't."

"I thought I was welcome to a pipe and a glass for old time's sake, sir," said the parson, reproachfully. "If I was in error, I make amends by saying adieu."

"Welcome? Egad! Tyne, of course you are welcome. No man more so, and, to prove it, do you pull that bell-rope so we can have up another flask; but I do say, Tyne, that it's shabby of you, deuced shabby, 'pon my word, and I didn't think it of you, Tyne; I didn't that. Why, man, think of the fix you're in! You say it's twenty pounds odd; well, I'll make it thirty-five pounds in your pocket. No; I'll do the handsome and make it fifty. What d' you say, Tyne, to that?"

"Suppose we leave it until morning, Mr. Baxcombe, sir? We'll both be clearer-headed then. Just now, the—er—queens have a way of—er—interchanging identities, as it were," laughed the jolly fellow, until the Honorable Donald, his attention diverted, began to tell of a visit paid the day before to a Mr. Claypole of Christ Church.

"The rummest sight you ever saw, Tyne. There the chap sat in his great chair, all bundled up to the chin, with a quart basin of barley-gruel beside him, and a little red book in his

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hand. ‘What’s this?’ said I. ‘This,’ he chuckled, ‘is a little physicking and cramming I always undergo when I am about to play whist. I’ve an engagement at Ogden’s to-night, and, I dare say, by then my blood ’ll be cool enough to let me come off with a guinea or three.’ Fancy! That’s the limit of science, eh? What chance do we poor devils who love our glass of evenings stand with men like that, Tyne? It’s robbery, ’pon my soul! Not that I bother, because my tipple never upsets me in the least, but it’s beastly hard on the rest of you, you know, when it confuses the knaves and the queens.’

“Ah,” said the cleric, “the secret of life is spotting the knaves.”

“And the queens. Don’t forget the queens, Tyne. Ah, Tyne, such beauty, such grace, such womanliness! The like isn’t to be found this side of St. James’s. You remember those engravings that came out years ago — ‘A St. James’s Beauty’ and ‘A St. Giles’s Beauty,’ eh? Well, this girl makes that patrician dame look like an error ha’penny. Ah, you should see her, Tyne. ’Fore Gad, you shall marry us! I’ll not hear no, and may the act be demned!”

As the parson was shaking his head in negation, a trio of voices could be heard on the stairs,

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two rough and determined, the third mildly expostulative.

"What's that, eh?" inquired the Honorable Donald.

"I—I am sure," replied Tyne, "I can't fathom, sir."

The voices grew louder and louder, ending when two burly fellows, in scarlet coats, behind whom stood the terrified Parsons, appeared in the doorway.

"Oho!" said the foremost bailiff, with a knowing leer. "Oho!"

"That's 'im, roight enuf," chuckled the other, while Tyne shrank back in dismay.

"And who am I?" said the Honorable Donald, coldly. "Do you want anything of me?"

"Not as we knows hof," growled the larger of the two men; "but we wants twenty-three pound ten and six of 'im there, besides four pound sixteen, costs, hand hif 'e hain't got hit there'll be no spongin' 'ouse hin 'is'n. 'E'll go straight to the Fleet, 'e will."

The cleric swallowed hard, but was too proud to ask aid in such company.

"Come, parson, speak hup. 'Ere's the bill; where's the money?"

"I haven't that much in the world," said the poor man, with an attempt at calm.

"Wait a moment," drawled the Honorable

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Donald, as the fellows stepped forward. "You two are not within your rights in this house, and you know it. Parsons, my riding-whip!"

When the whip was brought Mr. Baxcombe swished it experimentally.

"It is a good whip," he quietly observed. Then, turning to the fugitive, he asked, "Shall I pay this, Tyne?"

"Mr. Baxcombe, sir," he exclaimed, "I cannot ask it, but my gratitude, my lifelong gratitude, sir—"

"There are terms, Tyne. You can very well guess their nature."

"They are hard terms, sir," sighed the parson, his eyes wandering from the bailiffs to Baxcombe and his mind's eye busy with the horrors of the Fleet; "but such kindness demands some sacrifice on my part. You are—are firm, sir?"

"Firm, Tyne."

Suddenly the idea occurred to the cleric that once the money was paid there could be no recovery, while the marriage lay *in futuro*; he would be free to do as he pleased anent it.

"Well, Tyne?" said Mr. Baxcombe, tartly.

"Having no alternative, sir, I surrender gratefully—most gratefully," said the parson.

When the men had gone he would have fallen to his knees had not the Honorable Donald restrained him by clasping his hand.

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“I’ll never forget this night, lad—never, as long as I live.”

“Nor the Morrow, Tyne.”

“Nor the Morrow, sir,” he said, wincing, “to be sure.”

“To be very sure, Tyne,” said Mr. Baxcombe, suavely, “I post-dated the check a day.”

## V

WHEN Mr. Baxcombe presented himself at the inn in Castle Street there was little in his appearance to betray the influence of wine. His eyelids were slightly inflamed and his lips were a trifle parched, but in no greater degree than would result from a night of sleeplessness caused, it might be, by anxiety, yet he had just arisen from the card-table, at which, with the parson, he had been the night long. Tyne had been much put out of countenance by the return of the bailiffs on account of the dating of the check, but, having been assured by Baxcombe that the paper would be honored, they withdrew.

"I have my scruples, sir," moaned the parson.

"But you'll be no martyr to them, I take it," returned the Honorable Donald, and left the reverend gentleman, under lock and key, to the solace of small-beer and *The Oxford Journal*.

So slight were the traces of debauchery that Miss Starke, pale and drooping, saw nothing but the man to whom her heart was given.

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"It was too late to come when your note reached me," he said, bending over the fingers she extended.

"I know," she said, simply. "Where are we going for this last time?"

There was all the tension of tragedy in the little scene. He towered above her in all the glory of a plum-colored frock, breeches of spotless nankeen, and boots like unto no man's in Oxford. She, entreaty in her gaze, personified eloquence in each curve of her figure and in her color, which ebbed and flowed.

"I thought of Osney Abbey," he said.

"I have seen an engraving of the old place," she said, as the coach turned into High Street, "or, rather, a re- engraving from an old print. It must be wonderfully picturesque."

"I am afraid you will be disappointed. Probably the plate was cut a hundred years ago. Little remains save a pile of stones and an old out-building—that and its associations."

The ardor of his gaze abashing her, she dropped her eyes.

"Do you often go up to London?" she asked. "I—I mean have you often been there? Do you think I shall like it? I am half afraid, now that it is so near."

"London," he said, grimly, "is the clearing-house for all that is vicious in the empire. When

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you ask me that, I must own that I know not whether you will like it, because I know nothing of your London. The London I understand is St. James's Street and Soho Square. 'Up to town' means up to a district no larger than our estate; the rest is on the map, but it might be in the infernal regions for all the *ton* knows of it."

"Then you understand the vicious part only?" she said, wistfully.

"I own that I stand in need of reform."

Her little hand crept towards him and then hastily retreated.

"I have been thinking of entering the company's service," he added, slyly, "now that there is no inducement to return to the Hall."

"The company? A soldier company?"

"Mayhap," he smiled; "but I meant the East India Company."

She shivered, and he noticed.

"It seems the only thing left. Clive was a ne'er-do-well, a village loafer, when he quitted England; after Pondicherry he was the nation's idol. I can't take to myself the virtues of such a man; but few things are more inspiring than desperation."

"Are you so desperate?" she asked.

The coach was rounding the castle, and in a moment the quiet country would be reached.

"Too desperate to care; desperate enough to

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risk fever and French bullets for the gain. They say hope springs eternal in the human breast."

"Is there no hope at home? Why cross the miles of sea, and, mayhap, die in some dreadful spot, when hope is still with you?"

"Would you care?" he was whispering, with his lips so close to her temple that his breath played with the loose strands of her hair.

Why would her heart beat so foolishly and tell that which her lips would deny; the roses in her cheeks were tale-bearers, too.

"Would you care, dear?" he asked, when, with a jolt, the coach stopped.

"Yonder be ther abbey, sir," chuckled the driver, standing, whip in hand, by the door.

Little was to be seen of the venerable structure, but neither he nor she was in antiquarian mood. Each blade of grass, rising from its stone-hemmed cradle, was diamond-tipped with the rains of yesterday, and the sky was of that yellow cast which succeeds a storm. They picked their way towards the tumble-down out-house that might have been a penitent's cell or a cattle-stall, and the girl chose, as women will, to apply romance where none should have been. Unwilling to break in upon a train of thought which, doubtless, was to his advantage, Mr. Baxcombe said nothing, and she thought of the magpies.

According to report, Elizabeth, wife of Robert

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d'Oilgi, Lord of the Castle of Osney, asked Ralph, her confessor, what the magpies chattering in the trees were saying, and Ralph, who understood the language of the birds, even though he did not speak it, replied that they were souls undergoing torment in purgatory, and suggested founding a monastery on the spot in order that their pitiable state might be relieved by prayer.

"And is it so?" said Elizabeth. "Then, if my husband will grant my request, I will endeavor to bring rest to these poor souls."

With this tale Miss Starke was familiar, and as she slipped over the moss-clad rocks it was not difficult to imagine herself a second Lady Elizabeth, whose clear duty it was to minister to the relief of the handsome soul who pleaded so hard where such a little plea would have sufficed.

"When are you going?" she asked, when they stopped close by the out-house for breath.

"The *City of Benares*, East-Indiaman, sails to-morrow fortnight."

"When would you come back?"

"That is not easily foretold, since fevers and wars wait on no man."

"Two years—three years?" she persisted.

"Two years?" he laughed, taking her hands in his. "A career made in two years? Pestilence, bullets, and deprivation braved out and advancement gained, step by step, through all

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the channels and byways for which the company is infamous, all in two years—three years? Ten years, twenty years; mayhap never, little girl."

How wonderfully pretty she was, with her blue eyes, her quivering lips, and the loving way in which her hair curled about her temples! Slowly he drew her towards him until, when she, startled, awoke, a lover's space separated them.

"Three words from you will keep me, dear," he was whispering. "The three little words for which I have been waiting ever since those old days."

"Please don't go," she said, brokenly.

"Those are not the three, dear."

She was shaking throughout her whole body.

"I love you," he whispered, bending his handsome head to the level of hers. Slowly she raised her eyes until they met his, and there was transformation enough there to stir his heart as it never had been stirred.

"You love me?" she said, wonderingly. "Yet—is that all?"

"It is the beginning," he said, drawing her to him until she could scarce breathe. "I want you to marry me at once—to-day, this morning!"

"Let me go!" she pleaded.

"I'll never let you go again."

"It isn't that," she said, softly, slipping from

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his arms and turning her tear-dimmed eyes from him; "but let me think—just let me think, Don."

"Are you afraid, little girl?" he asked, after a moment.

"No," she responded, turning to him a face illumined by love. "I'm only proud and happy."

It was a quarter to five when the hackney-coach, bearing the Honorable Donald and Lady Baxcombe, turned again into Castle Street. At the same time the best horses Tyne could hire with a pocketful of guineas were drawing the worthy cleric through the south gate in the direction of London.

In the court-yard of the Star and Garter stood Mrs. Fortescue's travelling-coach, ready for the road, even to the boxes and bandboxes strapped up behind, and as the Honorable Donald rattled in that lady, attracted by the noise and urged to impatience, appeared at the railing of the upper balcony.

"Well, sir!" she snapped, as Mr. Baxcombe stepped to the ground. "At last!"

Without the slightest heed he assisted his bride to the ground and commanded her boxes unstrung. Mrs. Fortescue, dropping her spying-glass, through which she had been gazing at the girl, gasped, and then countermanded the order.

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"Well, fellow?" said Baxcombe to the hostler.

"Don't put a finger on them!" shrieked the dame. "Landlord! Such insolence! Where is the landlord?"

"Please, Mrs. Fortescue—" began her ladyship, tremblingly.

"Be silent, ungrateful chit! Boy, fetch the landlord here! Never have I been so insulted. The landlord, fetch him at once!"

Mine host, being found, sought to mediate.

"Beggin' your honor's pardon, the things belong to the lady, and your honor must not touch them."

"If he does I'll have the watch on him!" cried the old woman.

"The lady is going to take the road, your honor, and this is her coach. I dare say your honor has made some mistake."

"Is it so?" retorted Mr. Baxcombe, at white heat. "I have no concern with yonder old hag, but this lady is my wife, and I'll have her boxes unstrung without more to-do. Understand me?"

A murmur of delight passed around the crowd of loungers, to whom all this was better than the playhouse, since there was no cost attached. It was an effective picture: the stalwart, handsome gentleman, with eyes aflame and lips tight drawn, by the side of the then imperious girl. Mine host, completely taken back, stared stupid-

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ly, first at the one and then at the other. Mrs. Fortescue's shrill voice broke the silence.

"The man must be in drink."

"You see, sir," groped the landlord, "the old lady yonder—"

"Take down my boxes at once," interrupted her ladyship, with a stamp of her dainty foot, "else you force my husband to extremes."

"Ungrateful minx!" called Mrs. Fortescue. "Present yourself to me immediately."

"I forbid you to go," snarled Mr. Baxcombe, and the crowd tittered.

"Oh, please, Donald!" my lady begged, and the touch of her hand reconciled him. She flew in-doors, and he remained to see the boxes taken down.

"What means this?" demanded the old woman when she and the girl were together. "Where have you been with that drunken donkey, miss? How dare you go off like this, when you knew we were to start at three? Have you been drinking, too?"

"Madame!"

"Don't 'madame' me, you hussy! Your eyes are red and your cheeks flushed. So this is your gratitude to me! What did the man mean by calling out that you were his wife? A likely tale. Out with it, this instant!"

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“It is true, madame,” said the girl, proudly.  
“I am his wife.”

Unable to restrain herself, Mrs. Fortescue stepped towards her ladyship, with a hand uplifted as though to strike, but the girl failed to flinch.

“You—you—” choked the furious old woman—“you fool! You sneaking, treacherous, viperous fool!”

“I am not here to be insulted, madame,” said her ladyship, with flashing eyes. “You forget yourself.”

“His wife!” sneered Mrs. Fortescue, dropping her hand. “You little fool, you’ll not even be his mistress many hours. Have you never heard of the Hardwicke Act—the Marriage Act? You will both land in Newgate. There were no banns. Was there a special license taken out? Tell me, miss!”

“I refuse to talk with you, madame.”

“No! Of course there was not, and you knew very well what you were about. You did this to cheat me, you hussy!” shrieked the woman. “Like a ninny, you prefer to give yourself to a drunken, penniless donkey rather than to—but, mark me, you shall regret it, miss—”

“Have done, madame,” interrupted Mr. Baxcombe, white and stern, from the doorway, “and leave us in peace.”

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"This room is mine," cried the dame, wildly, "and I want no sots inside it."

"On the contrary, I have but this moment engaged it. Your coach is ready for the road."

"If I take it, 'twill be to the chief constable I'll drive," the woman retorted. "No man may play tricks with the law."

"Nor women such as you," said Baxcombe, throwing wide the door.

## VI

AND Mrs. Fortescue went, puffed toadlike with impotence, straight through the gate pointing the London road. The splashes of mud left by the coach-wheels of the Rev. Dr. Tyne were still wet upon the stones.

"When Temple hears of this there'll be the deuce to pay," she muttered, "and I shall have the blame of 't. A pretty penny it's cost me—drat the baggage! I'd give a purseful to have my pound of flesh, but 'twon't do now. When I'm in town I'll see about it, and in the mean time Temple 'll attend to this coxcomb. Lud! Collyn's no man to trifle with, and that's consolation."

That anent the baronet was true enough, and had been so proven in affairs with coffee-house loungers, but Mr. Baxcombe gave it no concern. Nor was he perturbed by the woman's threat to inform the constabulary. She was too much of a *mondaine* to do that, but he was quite prepared to believe that the news would reach Bow Street, indirectly, as soon as her coach rolled

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over the London cobbles. This train of thought, together with his abstinence from drink since calling at the inn that morning, was sobering him, and when he turned to her ladyship after Mrs. Fortescue's departure his features bore traces of anxiety.

"Is it true?" her ladyship asked, tensely yet playfully, as though ashamed of the query.

"Is what true?" he said, sinking against the window-sash.

"What this strange, horrible creature said. Is it true that we both can be sent to prison for—for—I don't know for what?"

"I dare say she is better qualified for the bar sinister than we," he gently responded. "She has carried her imposition far. I wouldn't carry it further if I were you."

"She spoke of the Marriage Act; what is the Marriage Act, please? She called me names for not knowing of it. Is it something to threaten us, Donald? Ah, Donald, it can't be that!"

"What could it be but an act to regulate marriage?" he said, naively.

For several moments the girl stood mute, while he fiddled with his walking-stick. The growing anguish in her eyes was not good to look upon. Men have turned from similar reproach in the eyes of a wounded fawn. The Honorable Donald said nothing, and before the tribu-

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nal of her heart no more damning evidence could be adduced than that silence. The clock on the mantel ticked insolently on. She, too, was recovering from intoxication—of love's exotic moment—and clarity was lent her reason. Mr. Baxcombe looked out into the mists of the late afternoon and she looked forth into the mists of the years. The pretty face grew pale and withered; the lips, once red, were lifeless and trembling. Mrs. Fortescue was but one league away, yet an eternity had come and gone.

"I think you had better tell me," she said, with a tenderness that was infinite.

"Let us be spared a scene," he said. "What is there to tell?"

"I think you had better tell me," she repeated, but less steadily. "Mayhap, I can help you. If I am your wife, I have a right to know; if I am not—"

She faltered. The tone in which the negative was uttered was a note from the heart. It penetrated the room, quivered on the air, as a bugle blast could not have.

"If I am not," she went on, after a moment, "I have a still better right to know."

"Whatever has been done," he said, rapidly, "was done for your good. We may have been hasty, we may have made a mistake, but it was the best I knew and was for your sake."

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"Who am I—what am I to you, then?" she asked, breathlessly. "Where is the mistake?"

"You are as much to me as you ever were."

"What am I to other people?" she questioned, in a tone the pathos of which was terrible to hear.

He made no reply, and, crossing to him, she placed one hand on his shoulder.

"How far would this have gone, Donald? I can't believe the old days are all blotted out. I said to Mrs. Fortescue that a Starke need never fear hurt from a Baxcombe. I can bear this, Donald, bravely, if you will tell me that it was only folly. You said there was no crime in the university, don't you remember? Tell me that my faith in you isn't worthless. Donald, mine is a full heart; don't let it break!"

"If you ever come to know the circumstances," he said, crossing to the hearth—"you shall not have them from me—you will realize that 'crime' is a hard word to apply. What I have done I will make good. Our union can easily be made legal; we have only to go through it again and properly. If you mean to accuse me of any dishonorable purpose, you err—"

"Oh, I know!" she sobbed, and, noting the agony in her eyes, he spoke more gently.

"So I tell you that this was folly only. Had I been more clear-headed I probably should have bethought some other way."

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"That is the part I don't understand," she said, wearily. "That is the—" She was about to say "cruel part." "Why not be honest with me? Surely you should be, Donald. Women are weak, easily carried away by—by every wind that blows. Had I only stopped to think I—I would have seen that what we thought was love was only a passing fancy. As it is, we have made a mistake, but not beyond remedy. You shall go home and we will forget. It was only play. We both realize that now—I quite as much as you."

She dared not meet his startled eyes; it was all she could do to command her trembling voice.

"And you propose this?" he said, peevishly.

"We should be glad we found ourselves out, Donald. I do propose it, because it is the only honest plan. For us to marry, neither loving the other, would be horrible; you must see that."

"It doesn't occur to you," he said, "that my leaving you would brand me a poltroon. That I was heated with wine does not excuse me."

"You had been drinking?" she said, in a hard voice. "Is that the circumstance of which you spoke?"

An ugly flush mantled his cheeks.

"Is there any way in which this marriage could be proven?" she went on, her eyes flashing under the insult of which he seemed unconscious.

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"If there is none—if it is not recorded—nothing can come of it. We can part here and now."

"You are hard," he burst out. "I have not said that I want to part with you. I said that it was a mistake, because for all I have I am dependent upon the Earl. I wanted to keep you the girl I knew you were. I went too far, but that doesn't matter. Surely you can find no fault with the match, and you—you are pretty enough and sweet enough—"

"Hush!" she whispered. "I must not listen. You have no right."

"Mayhap I didn't mean all I said this afternoon," he was saying, his face close to hers, "but the most of it I meant. Anyway, I'll stand by it all, and you must. 'Fore Gad! I'm not such a cur as to let you go. What I said was from the heart. Our wine sometimes discovers us to ourselves, you know. But for it I would have kept my tongue and—and this thing would have been put off for a while, that is all."

Placing her small hands against his shoulders, she forced herself from his clasp.

"You said you wanted to keep me as I was. What do you mean? What did you fear for me?"

"That is the circumstance."

"You seem to think you have preserved me from some injury. What injury? What is this all about?"

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"Your father, dear, is less wise than most men, less worldly. He is on his way here—should be here now."

"On his way here? Why? How do you know?"

"I wrote to him, through the Earl, for your sake. Things are not—"

"For my sake! Again for my sake!" she exclaimed, her bosom heaving. "Why did you do this? Tell me, in a few words. Why?"

He crossed to the window and lounged against it.

"Have you ever read *The Vicar of Wakefield?*?" he slowly asked.

"No," she retorted.

"It is by Oliver Goldsmith," he parried, for a heavy coach could be heard bumping over the Castle Street cobbles.

"Why did you write to father?" she demanded, tapping a dainty foot.

With a roar the coach swung under the court arch and rolled into the yard, flashing the Tweeddale crest before the Honorable Donald's anxious gaze.

"Ask him, dear," the young fellow said. "He is below stairs now."

John Starke was of that God-fearing type which admits of no temporization with the Scriptural precept. The age was nothing, en-

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vironment was nothing, temperament was nothing. His word was meant for all ages, all environments, and all temperaments. The majority of the clergymen of the Georgian era raced horses, rolled hazard, and then rolled to bed, but with them he had no affinity. His was the Wesleyanism of the Church of England—stern, barren, hard as flint. He came to Ashley at the age of twenty-three, and at fifty-six he stayed on there. Preferments ignored him. Bishops came — among them he of Osnabruck — but John Starke remained an humble curate.

From the impoverished family of Cutts, gentlemen farmers, Mrs. Starke was chosen, and was soon moulded into the delectable stiffness of true piety. At her mother's death Hattie was ten years of age and a little old woman, never having had a chance to be a child. The awakening came a few years later, when the Broughtons took a fancy to the chestnut-haired girl with the wistful face, and invited her to the Hall. She analyzed that which she saw, and pored over *The Gentleman's Magazines* left her, and carried home in a basket beneath a mound of blackberries, with a growing realization that a fairyland lay somewhere beyond the pine forest. Instinctively she adopted the grand manner, and when her father noticed the change he set it down as the fruition of his pious labors,

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until he discovered a badly stained volume under his daughter's dresser. Thereafter she visited the Hall much less frequently.

Neither parent nor child recognized the glorious beauty which greeted the one at the breakfast-table and the other in the mirror, so there was no suspicion that Temple's services were based on other grounds than appreciation of John Starke's service to the Church. The idea of a London parish frightened the curate at first, coming as from the heavens, but as he became more accustomed to the suggestion it grew into an entirely just and proper estimation of his lifelong labor. There was none to warn him. The Broughtons and Tweeddales were landed nobility who, caring nothing for the frivolities of the town, lived their lives in the country, and so knew nothing of the machinery of vice. A more apt parallel than that contained in *The Vicar of Wakefield* could not have existed; but how many of us fetch the printed moral to our hearthstones?

Upon receipt of Donald's letter the distraught parson and the Earl sought out Sir Collyn Temple, who, in a fine burst of rage, branded the author as a liar whom the baronet would call out and punish.

"Sir," said my lord, "if you are innocent the boy will be the first to make amends."

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"And if you are a 'scoundrel,'" moaned the parson, "what calamity may not have overtaken my little lamb?"

Without delay the Earl supplied his travelling-coach, drawn by six fleet blacks, and, having sent an outrider ahead to prepare relays, saw white-haired John Starke on the way to Oxford.

The roads were still treacherous with slime, yet he urged the postilions to reckless effort. Taking neither food nor drink himself, he fumed at every halt, and when the men urged the necessity for refreshment, said:

"True, true, but in God's name, be quick!"

Only his magnificent energy sustained him until the coach drew up before Brasenose. Parsons, in dismay at sight of the hollow-eyed, cavernous-cheeked clergyman, stammered that his master might be at the Star and Garter; if not, he did not know where Mr. Baxcombe was.

With wildly beating heart, Starke drove to Castle Street, where, in response to his request for Mrs. Fortescue, he was informed she had taken the road en route to town.

"Alone?" he cried.

"I don't know as that's any business of yours, sir," said the tavern-keeper, "unless you're the young lady's father."

"I am," gulped John Starke. "Is she here?"

## VII

WHEN the Hanoverians reigned, any token of natural feeling was considered, in good society, a red badge of vulgarity, and, among the clergy, a certain brand of fallen virtue. So John Starke, for fear of seeming to condone the situation, spoke gravely and soberly, as became a man of God; but when he heard of the new difficulty sobriety gave place to fear.

"That is no marriage, sir," he exclaimed, "save in His eyes! There is the law."

"It shall touch neither of us," Baxcombe said. "We have influence enough for that."

"Say you so?" the parson grieved. "It may be, sir. They may not call it an infringement of the law. They may call it by another name, a name you should shudder, with me, to think on. In God's name, lad, wherein have you bettered things by taking that which you sought to spare? I'll not believe you were vicious—your letter goes far to prove the contrary—but, merciful Heaven! was there ever such folly, was there ever such—"

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"It can be corrected, parson, and it shall be. There was no evil, and none shall be assigned to either of us."

"Nor shall any one suffer for it," said the girl, her head held high.

"You least of all," he quickly returned.

"I am not to be considered," she said. "To save me from — from what we all know now, you brought me to a peril infinitely less. To marry you, not loving you, would be a crime. I'll not do that to save myself."

"Be quiet, child," reproved her father. "'Tis a poor time to spout words."

"'Tis the only time I'll have. I've been to blame in none of this, father, and I'll not bring blame upon myself by acting wrongly now."

"I know," said the tortured old man. "The fault was mine. I should have been less sordid, more wise. Young sir," he continued, after a moment, "the blame is to be shared between us. You erred most foolishly, but you have your youth in your favor. My lapse was still greater, and I have no excuse; but, to look towards the result, the child must suffer. It is hard, boy, because she is a good girl. I know not how you look upon this. What is in your mind to do?"

"Loving her," said Baxcombe, sturdily, "and refusing to believe that she does not love me,

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there is no doubt in my mind as to what should be done."

"Ah! But you don't love me," said the girl, with a sob she sought to restrain. "You have told me so. You would do it for honor's sake."

"In any event; but in this I do it because I love you. I have never said or hinted or dreamed otherwise. You would misunderstand, and I could not help it. I told you it was a mistake, dear, and it was. I am entirely dependent upon the Earl, and am low in his favor. He may turn me out without a penny. I said it was folly. It was folly, and worse, to expose you to scandal and possible arrest. I was in wine. I told you that as the only explanation, not of my love, but of my recklessness. I have not said that I do not love you. I did say that I would never let you go. For the rest—you must allow me some pique—you said you did not love me. Parson, we must get a license from the bishop."

Hattie looked away. Starke, who had been closely watching the young man, swallowed hard.

"We must not forget," he said, "that for three-and-thirty years I and mine have lived upon your father's generosity. I know the Earl to be a man of the strictest honor; but I know, too, such is the social law of this kingdom that, under other conditions, no such marriage as this

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could be possible. My girl is a good girl, of the very best, barring some childish errors, but she is not your equal socially. I would be lacking in all gratitude if, to save myself and mine, I urged the Earl and his to take the burden. It must be left to his lordship. If you are dependent, you should not act independently. We, Hattie and I, will abide by his decision, and if it is favorable there is no reason to suppose that, loving each other, you will be other than happy. God knows, I hope it for you! I hope, too, that all this will be forgotten. I—”

The gray head drooped for a moment.

“Daughter,” he said, simply, and in his gaze was human nature, not piety. There was a whir of skirts, and she, nestling in his arms, was combing back the gray locks and sobbing softly.

So it was decided, and the Honorable Donald, despite objection, hired a coach-and-four and took the road in the wake of the family chariot bearing the curate and the girl. The coaches kept within a stone’s-throw of each other until Coventry was reached, at eleven in the evening, where the Honorable Donald halted for the night. Starke, despite the lateness of the hour, pushed on, arriving at Ashley the following evening, while Baxcombe was dashing through Wolverhampton, miles in the rear. Finding that there was no possibility of reaching the

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Hall before midnight, the Honorable Donald bade his postillions make less haste, intending to drive through to Market Drayton for the night. As his coach passed the Elizabethan structure he pressed his face against the front glass and saw that the house was still and dark.

It was best to go on, for men and things are less severe in the morning light. It was a cold, bleak night, and the prospect of the Corbett Arms was warming to the heart; but again and again the heavy knocker fell, with no other effect than to emphasize the desertion of the cobbled lanes.

“Might as well turn about, I dare say,” the Honorable Donald growled; “and curse me for a fool!”

But a postilion, chilled to the bone—for if it was cold in the coach it was far colder outside it—begged another effort, and a night-capped head appeared at an upper window demanding to know what the trouble was.

“Think you 'tis a hand at play we're after? Lud! man, what could we want other than a fire, a glass, and a bed?” retorted Baxcombe. “Egad! you've none too keen an eye to profit.”

A few minutes later, when the door was opened by a gentleman in a flowered robe and a night-cap, Mr. Baxcombe apologized.

“The porter's in his cups again,” the gentle-

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man explained, "so I've robbed him of his keys. You'll find mine host in The Fox and Grapes, first landing to the right; but I'll go with you."

"Ah, thanks, but I know."

"You've been here before? Gad! Was the experience lost?"

"My home is in the vicinity," said Baxcombe, smiling.

"Ah! Then you may be Donald Baxcombe. Am I shrewd there?"

"My name is Baxcombe, and you, sir, have the advantage."

"Craigmarnock is mine," said the gentleman. "You see, I've heard of you."

"We may be acquainted, then, after all. The Earl has many—"

"No, we're not," Mr. Craigmarnock said, quickly. "As I said, I've heard of you. You are well known around the country."

With which they parted to their beds. At ten the next morning, when the Honorable Donald was sipping his chocolate, the Earl was being whirled towards the Corbett Arms in a chariot drawn by four speedy bays. He had been informed of the situation by Parson Starke, who had galloped over from Ashley. Many a rustic, hearing the rush of wheels, gaped and wondered whyfor such mad driving. Within the Earl fingered his walking-stick and groaned. Hither-

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to the family escutcheon had been unblemished by mésalliance or scandal. The Countess Tweeddale, a few years deceased, was the daughter of the Marquis of Rawley; her predecessor was the niece of the Earl of Dorchester; so on throughout the family tree. For centuries the blood of the Tweeddales had been unassailable. The Earl fumbled his cane and groaned. And the thing had been done. Morally, it had been done, and, morally, it could not be abrogated. He was glad of the boy's inclination to accept the situation; the line had always been distinguished by integrity. There might be worse blotches than mésalliance. Ay! For this was not the first taste of bitterness his lordship had known; it was the climax.

Mayhap it was for the best, after all; but were there not enough pretty and charming women in their own grade of life? There was nothing to be said against this girl save that her blood would poison their blood, which had come down unsullied from the first Earl Tweeddale, invested on the field of Poitiers.

“Benton,” rasped my lord, “faster!”

There were no signs of indecision about the Earl’s lips. On the panels of his coach doors were the words, “*Fides et Justitia.*”

Arrived at the Arms, his lordship proceeded, unannounced, to his son’s chamber.

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"So," he murmured. "Why did you not spend the night at the Hall?"

"The hour was late, sir," the boy replied, drawn to his full height and tense in every muscle.

"Not content with being a rake, you have blossomed into a fool," remarked the Earl. "Are you ready to start?"

The drive from the market town to Baxcombe Hall is one of extreme beauty. Staffordshire is one of the most favored of the shires in that it combines pasture and mountain views; on one side stretches the fair green of England, while on the other the Welsh hills rise in the distance, in brown and green and blue. As they entered the family park moisture glistened on the boy's lashes. Visions of the days when all this was not crowded upon him. Hot tears welled to his eyes, but, feeling the parental gaze, he kept them back. This was a home-coming, indeed! In a sudden rush of passion his own derelictions were swept from sight; not he but the man before him was to blame. Defiantly he raised his eyes to his father's.

"Well?" he said, insolently.

"Your mother, with pride and love absorbing her, bade you godspeed from that bench when you first left for Oxford. Her death

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called you home three months later. I am glad she is dead, Donald," said the Earl.

The servants awaited their young master in the driveway. Like most profligates, he was popular with menials. The Earl stood by and watched the evident sincerity on both sides, thinking it a pity that these people, not he, had found his son's heart.

"Your old room is ready, Donald," he said. "You had better lunch there. At three I wish to see you in my study."

The chamber was situated in a tower, and opened upon a veranda overlooking the driveway. About the walls were numerous chalk sketches of the grounds and a portrait of the Countess, which bespoke genius in the young man whose work they were.

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Donald, sir," said a servant whose duties had prevented him from being present when the coach arrived.

"Thanks, Barker. The people below-stairs seem to be the only ones who are," the boy said, savagely. Then, lighting a Virginia clay, he walked out on the veranda. The air smelled good, and he drank it in deep draughts. From somewhere floated the "Stole Away" of a hunting-horn. He knew the huntsmen, every man of them, from Tom Carley, M.F.H., to little Stubbins, who could scarce stick on a horse.

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Down the driveway trotted a magnificent boar-hound.

“Crœsus!” he cried. “Crœsus!”

The dog paused and glanced wonderingly about.

“Crœsus!”

The delicate muzzle sniffed the air. Then, with a yelp of delight, the hound bounded from view, and presently his claws scraped the stairs. The door opened for him, and hound and master welcomed each other as only hound and master may.

## VIII

“MY son,” the Earl said, when they were together in the study, “during your mother’s life you wrecked her fondest hopes, as you continue to wreck mine. She and I saw in you such indications towards excess that we trembled for you. We seldom mentioned it to each other, because each knew that the other knew and was struggling for you. All the while, however, we recognized two traits of your character which rejoiced us and did much to compensate for the shortcomings. We saw that you were not selfish and were not cruel. Those two did away with the possible element of viciousness. Another trait, naturally undeveloped, that we believed you to possess was a high sense of honor in your relations with women.”

Here the Earl ceased dallying with his quill and met his son’s gaze; neither flinched. When he resumed his voice was a trifle unsteady.

“Mayhap we idealized you there. Young men of this day have many temptations and the encouragement of social sentiment. May-

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hap we did idealize. God knows, we longed to believe in you. I know, my boy, that had your mother been alive when this thing occurred it would have killed her. Well, I—”

After pausing to recover himself, the old gentleman said, briskly:

“Donald, I will epitomize your career in the hope that it will impress you. Your college allowance was a thousand guineas yearly, with the distinct understanding that you were not to exceed it by going in debt. During your first year at Oxford I was compelled to pay gambling debts amounting to six hundred and thirty-one pounds—more than half your allowance of itself. I helped you with your tailor, thirteen pounds odd; your boot-maker, nineteen pounds; your hatter, seven pounds ten. It was well I insisted on your accounts being settled yearly, was it not? The bill sent me by the faculty for your share of damage done in one of the gown riots was twenty-seven pounds. The total excess for that year was well over six hundred and fifty guineas. The second year, I am glad to say, there were no gambling debts, but the tradesmen’s bills continued, and, in addition, I had to buy off the woman with whom you became entangled. Since I have already commented on these things, I will not repeat myself. The total

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for this second year was three hundred and ninety pounds. You may see the items if you wish. In this, your third year, but two months of which you have spent in Oxford, there have been no extras, but I suppose you have nearly exhausted the thousand to your credit. How much remains, Donald?"

The young man, who had listened gravely, cleared his throat.

"I have eight hundred pounds, sir, on hand, and assets of a thousand more."

"Gambling assets?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then, if fortune had not favored you, you would now be two hundred pounds in debt instead of eight hundred clear, which would have necessitated my paying the thousand pounds in order that you might continue to live on the eight hundred. Pray, in what degree does such conduct differ from trickery? You know I must meet these obligations or see you ostracized by your fellows."

The boy bit his lip.

"What was the nature of the wager or wagers? No, stay! You need not answer. I prefer not to hear; but, understand me, from this day forth I will not give you a penny above your allowance. Debts of honor should be paid, but men of honor do not gamble upon their parents' affection."

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“Sir!”

“Do not miscomprehend me. I am speaking for the future—a great and glorious future if you will—but I pledge you my word, Donald, that I will not give you so much as a sixpence to save you from the sponging-house. God knows, I hate to say it, but it is my duty to you. With your ability, you may have the world at your feet. From the bottom of my heart I pray you to shake this moral distemper off. Lud! You have advantages that would have made Watteau weep. Sometimes I think advantages are a mistake; the battle for success is half won when it becomes a battle. I am in hope that this marriage, with its joys, its duties, and its privations, will be the making of you. Before, you had only yourself; now you have your wife for whom to work, and, as a younger son, it is right and proper for you to labor in a genteel field. That is the ethical side; the other is to be relied on more. The money you have thrown away on cards and silly coffee-house wagers must go to clothe her back; the foppish frills will adorn the child, and the wine and spirits will give place to physicians and milk. The thought, even, does me good.”

“But, sir, suppose that Miss Starke—”

“Her father discussed that with me, and we have concluded that you both must abide by

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your action. It is natural that she should feel a certain unwillingness to enter a family to its detriment, and to give herself to a man who was so little of a gentleman as to woo her with his veins under the influence of wine. In her present mood she does not consider the necessity for protecting herself from scandal, so it is her father's duty to judge for her. You were together for several hours after a mock ceremony of marriage; that is quite enough to damn you both unless we shield you by seeing that the ceremony is properly performed. I have sent to Stafford for a special license, and you shall be quietly married in our chapel. Incidentally, I may tell you that no influence of mine would have been strong enough to have secured you immunity from punishment, as you seemed to think; and, if it would, I should not have exercised it."

"I have not once thought of shirking my responsibility, sir," the boy said. "Give me credit for that."

"I give you all credit," said the Earl, "particularly because in no other respect does the least credit attach to you. Never in my life have I heard of such quixotic, brobdingnagian, a—a—asinine—but I'll not begin that. The girl married you in all good faith, and it should be a sacred charge. Her father believes that

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good may come of this evil. He hopes, and I hope, that it will be a lesson to both of you."

"What are your intentions, sir?" asked the young man, grimly.

"You will proceed to London the day after to-morrow. A friend of mine, a Mr. Craigmarnock, has seen your sketches and been impressed by them."

"Craigmarnock? I met a man of that name at the Arms."

"Ah! Did he mention the matter? No? He is a very quiet, self-contained man. When you reach London you will go to one Butterick, who keeps a picture and antiquary shop in Grub Street. He will endeavor to place whatever you may produce. Your drafts will be upon my agents, and will be payable monthly instead of yearly. You will not be allowed to overdraw. The only condition upon which I will listen to an advance will be the serious illness of either of you, and of that I must have assurance from you in writing. Although I do not anticipate anything of the kind, I will be on the safe side by telling you that if I hear of your neglecting your wife I will instantly stop your allowance and make a settlement upon her."

"You flatter me, sir," said the boy. "Are you quite done?"

The Earl, infinitely pained, looked at him.

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"Yes, my son. I am waiting upon you."

"Upon me?"

"I am awaiting," said the Earl, "the first sign that my son, whom I love better than my own life, repents the sorrow and evil he has wrought. Have you nothing to say, Donald?"

The boy dared not speak. The words that arose to his lips would sound insincere for fear of being too sincere. He looked at his father, and the Earl faded slowly from view; then a gentle hand rested upon the lad's shoulder.

"My son," the old nobleman was saying, "your tears make me happy. Donald, we begin from to-day."

The dinner-hour at Baxcombe Hall was two hours later than the fashionable four o'clock of London, in order that the pleasures of the country days might be prolonged. Shortly before four a chaise rolled over the pebbled driveway; within were Parson Starke and his daughter; behind were strapped a trunk and a flowered bandbox. The Earl, who, with the Honorable Donald, met them at the door, bade them welcome, and, stooping, kissed the girl's wan cheek. After all, the past was the past, and this a Lady Baxcombe. Reddening to the eyes, she courtesied.

Within the Hall she was given into the care of the motherly housekeeper.

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“Perkins will show you to your room, my dear,” said the Earl. “After you have rested, Donald will take you over the house, if you like. Many complimentary things have been said of the old place, and, now that you are one of us, I hope you will agree that it is not half bad.”

Tears gushed to her eyes, for she had not expected kindness.

“Is there anything your ladyship wishes?” inquired Perkins, when they were within the bed-chamber. “A nice cup of tea?”

“Yes,” she said, wearily, “a cup of tea, please,” and sank upon the window-seat.

The tea came, but she left it untouched. Upon one thing she was resolved—Lady Baxcombe, it seemed, she must be, but his wife she would not be until he had sued for the favor as none had sued since the days of the Round Table. This slip of a girl was neither vain, visionary, nor weak. Her russet curls and *retroussé* nose she accepted at their proper valuation. A certain charm of manner, the pretty shoulders, and neatly turned ankles were so much capital, and she was determined to bend every energy to their investment.

Dissimulation might be difficult, but she would learn. No matter how much her heart ached for him, she would bear with it until his ached for her. The only dowry she could bring him

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was herself, and she must make that self the peer of everything else in the world. Her head throbbed and she pressed her hands to it.

That he loved her she did not believe; that he might some day love her she hoped with all the strength of her being. Without that there could be nothing, and it was so terrible a crisis, so pitiable a wedding-day, so pathetic a bride.

The chapel was cold and bleak, as private chapels usually are, but from one of the Gothic windows to the chancel stretched a broad band of yellow sunshine to gladden the sober hearts at the altar.

To her father's grave reading she listened without passion, almost without interest, numbed and listless, but when the Honorable Donald lifted her right hand and held it in a firm, warm clasp, the blood surged through her veins. At the first sound of his voice self-possession returned to her, and, lifting her pretty head, she met her father's gaze and noted there what never had been there before—the love and devotion of a lifetime were shining down upon her. In a voice vibrating with affection he led her response with tears in his eyes.

“God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost, bless, preserve, and keep you: the Lord mercifully with His favor look upon you and fill you with all spiritual benediction and grace;

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that ye may so live together in this life that in the world to come ye may live everlasting. Amen."

The chapel lay eloquently peaceful and still.

Then the welkin in the tower rang out in mellow clang—a new Lady Baxcombe had come to her own.

## IX

LATE in the afternoon, when the Hall lay smothered in shadow save for the few feet about the fireplace, Baxcombe, returning from the stables, found his lady staring wistfully into the flames.

“Is it so sad a business?” he said, playfully, crossing to the hearth.

“I am not sad,” she replied.

“You are not merry, dear. ‘Tis this confounded gloom. I’ll tell Crawley to light up.”

“I like it as it is,” she said, quickly, and, indeed, the room was at its best by firelight, when the towering over-mantel of teakwood was thrown into high relief and inky shadow; when there was just enough left of day to silhouette the leaded windows against the sky.

“You look mightily fine,” he complimented, “with this red glow kissing your hair.”

“You don’t understand,” she said, evading his arms.

“Understand?” he repeated, flushing.

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The girl nodded, her own cheeks flushed and her eyes sparkling.

"I understand that you are my wife, and that I have a right to take kisses from my wife when I want them. And," he added, smiling, "to give them when she wants them."

"She does not want them taken or given. You have no right in the matter ; they are hers. You see," she continued, looking dangerously pretty in empiric sway, "you imagine that you have played a chivalrous and dramatic rôle—"

"I do not," he interrupted.

"But that is not my opinion. I was nothing to you, and am nothing. You are less to me. What you did, you did under the influence of wine. Do you expect that to appeal to me? It disgusts me. You do not love me, and I do not wish you to ; you do not respect me, and I cannot respect you. I am married to you through necessity. Please bear that in mind."

"God bless my soul!" he murmured ; but in his eyes a new light shone.

The next day being clear and bright, the Earl and parson set forth upon a tour of the property, leaving the young people to their own devices. They tarried at table.

"So this is the first breakfast of our new life," said the Honorable Donald.

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“Yes,” said her ladyship, nervously, for in her husband’s manner was a ready acceptance of the new order of things and a note of authority which made her less confident.

“Our little play of last eve did more credit to our truculence than to our sense,” he continued. “You are wrong in attributing to me a lack of respect for you. I have a deal of the quality. You have a very charming face to speak in your behalf.”

His manner was courteous, yet nonchalant. She listened with pouting lips, blushing at the compliment and hating herself for it.

“When a man marries he may do one of two things,” said Baxcombe: “accept his wife as she pleases to be, or attempt to mould her as he would like her to be. If she has not the capacity, his case is hopeless; if she lacks the incentive merely, he may supply it. I should prefer to have you work out your own salvation; at least, to have you meet me half-way in surrender and resignation, for the mutual good. We shall be the happier for the effort.”

“Suppose the wife disapproves of the husband,” she inquired, “can she mould him?”

“Beyond doubt,” he replied, “if she will employ the means God has granted her. She can drive him to nothing save excesses of temper and temperament.”

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“But he may—can drive her?”

“Society so has it.”

“Mayhap; but nature has not, and I am a child of nature in that respect, I do assure you.”

The Honorable Donald scrutinized her piquant face, and she met him merrily.

“I fear, madame, you are not in a serious mood,” he said.

“Sir, I am gravely attentive.”

He walked to the window.

“You are mistaken if you think I mean to be disagreeable,” she softly said. “We must work out a mutual salvation; to accomplish that, I am willing to do my share.”

“That is all I ask,” he said, quickly facing her.

“No,” she said. “You wish me to do the larger portion of your share, too. You want me, as early as this, to forget that in marrying you I had no real choice, and to give you all I would freely give to the man I loved. I am a woman; I cannot do that.”

“Why be churlish about a kiss?”

“You are a man,” she said, slowly, and dropped her eyes. “If I had kissed you it would have meant nothing, and, manlike, you cannot see that such a kiss would have degraded me in your eyes and in my own.”

“Then you do not love me? You were playing with me, and now you toss it in my face?”

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“Do you love me?”

In her flowing gray gown, gathered at the bosom and solely ornamented by a lace fichu at the neck, she was at her prettiest. The face and figure were delicate, and the robe clung prettily. As he gazed she watched him from under her heavy lashes. In his blue frock, nankeen breeches, and gleaming boots he seemed worthy of her.

“I shall do everything I can to help you,” she said, wistfully. “I shall try very hard to be a good wife to you. It isn’t necessary that we play at being lovers.”

“In a word, you expect the results of love without love?” he said, towering above her.

“I am not expectant,” she said, throwing back her head. The move brought the twitching lips too near, and, stooping, he kissed them. Then, seizing his French beaver, he walked away.

“I will see you at luncheon, Hattie,” he said, from the door, and, finding that she made no answer, left her.

When she was sure he was not going to return she threw a cloak about her shoulders and stepped into the garden. From the rear of the house a pathway, hedge bordered, led through the park to a lake where ancient firs reared their heads. She turned into the path, walking slowly. An aged gardener handed her a sprig of holly. She

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thanked him and passed on, twirling the berries between her fingers. Her view-point had changed, and she preferred living on this grand estate to going to London, but she understood why they must go; no matter what the circumstances, it was a crime for a Baxcombe to marry into the family of a country curate. By denying herself to her husband she could, at least, make him respect her for what she was, and that she would do. Of course, she could not prevent him from stealing kisses. Her lips still burned, so she moistened them and rubbed them with her handkerchief for conscience' sake. On the whole, she was not sorry he had taken the kiss, since he would be the more anxious for others.

At the edge of the forest the hedge ended and there was a stile. She clambered over, displaying her pretty ankles, and set forth into the woods, a frightened jack-rabbit scurrying in advance.

Evidently Mr. Baxcombe expected her to avow him as her savior, to believe that he had acted from the most disinterested of motives. She made a face at the idea. Her father had discoursed at length upon her ingratitude as contrasted with the high sense of honor displayed by the young man; upon the duties of a wife to a husband, and particularly of this wife to this husband. She felt that her duty to Mr. Bax-

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combe comprised companionship, as much as possible of esteem, and the shouldering of the burden of public appearance—after all, a goodly bit. Nevertheless, she found it necessary constantly to con these sentiments, for the gentleman of the blue frock was mightily attractive.

“But I won’t,” she said, fiercely, tossing pebbles into the lake; “I won’t, until he loves me.”

Then a horrible fear clutched at her heart; suppose he never loved her?

“I am a goose,” she said to the lake, and, with a sigh, turned towards the Hall again.

At the moment when Lady Baxcombe was entering the hedge-walk the Honorable Donald, on his mare Kitty Clive, was cantering towards it. The boxwood stood nearly six feet high, but at one point there was a good take-off, and neither slender-legged Kitty nor her rider measured danger by inches when it saved them, as in this case, a *détour* of many yards. The loamy soil gave no warning sound of hoof-beats, and the mare, rising to the hedge as a partridge flies, swerved to avoid the woman directly in the path of the leap. The swerve was fatal, and horse and rider pitched heavily into the boxwood.

“You are not hurt?” the girl cried.

“Devil a bit,” he returned, leaping to his feet. “But I frightened you, didn’t I?”

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"Oh, 'tis all over," she said. "I was out for a quiet walk, and I—I didn't expect you—"

"To drop from the sky," he suggested.

"Surely not from the sky."

"You are appreciative," he said, helping the mare to a footing; "but, do you know, I'm glad I frightened you."

"Oh!"

"Yes, because you were frightened into forgetting yourself and remembering me."

"Is the mare hurt?" she asked, biting her lip in vexation.

"That is an after-thought. May I walk with you?"

"Will not the mare's hoofs cut up the pathway?"

"It is my pathway."

"I said I was out for a quiet walk."

The emphasis was unmistakable.

"But, I assure you, I am not always so boisterous," he pleaded.

"It is your pathway," she said.

The servants and tenantry assembled that night in the Hall and were addressed by the Earl, who complimented them upon their past fidelity and expressed his belief that they would not now be lacking in deference and fealty to the bride their young master had taken to his

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bosom. The new Lady Baxcombe, who was known to most of them as a good friend in adversity, was then formally presented. As the honest folk filed past to kiss her hand her demeanor was perfect. To a girl of vulgar inclinations the situation would have afforded opportunities, but the Earl noted that her manner was sympathetic and unpretentious.

The last of the line was an aged man, with a face furrowed from exposure. As he bent over the fingers extended he said, feelingly:

“ If yer ladyship ’ll pardon an old man, I want to tell yer that if yer be as kind and thoughtful as the young marster’s mother were yer ’ll be all that God intinds wimmin fer to be. Yer goin’ ter be, ma’am, I see it in yer eye, and may God bless yer ladyship and grant yer both a happy life.”

Tears started to her eyes.

“ I will try,” she said, simply, and the cheers stormed the teak ceiling.

As soon as possible she fled to her room, wanting nothing but quiet and peace, for the day had been a hard one; but as she was about to retire her husband entered.

“ You need not be alarmed,” he said, hurriedly. “ I have come only to say good-night.”

“ Oh, good-night! good-night!” she said. “ I was not alarmed.”

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"You will be ready at six? We must start by then."

"Yes. I shall be ready. Good-night!"

Crossing to her, he laid his hand upon her shoulder.

"No," he said, "I'm not going to kiss you. I am going to tell you how much I admired my wife to-night."

She flushed prettily.

"I am glad, Donald. That is my share," she said.

At last the hour of departure arrived. The young lady was within the coach, and Mr. Broughton, mounted, had announced his intention of riding with them as far as Broughton Hall.

The clergyman leaned forward to say good-bye. His daughter's lips were twitching pitifully, for it is a sad business for women under the best of auspices.

"I'll remember all you've said, father," she said, brokenly. "I'll do my best."

"I hope so, daughter," he said. "Good-bye!"

But she clung to his hand and wept.

"There, there, child!" he whispered. "Your old father merits the reproaches. There are none for you. Only bear in mind, daughter, that all the wifely virtues must be doubly

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marked. London is a vast, wicked place. No—no—I do not fear. It is not that, but there must be no suspicion, no word, daughter. Do your full duty, if for no other reward than that of conscience, and all will come well. Be good to her, my boy," he added, turning to Donald. "She is only a wee lamb."

The tone of solicitude struck the young man's heart. "I will, sir," he said, bravely. "Trust me."

"Good-bye!" said the Earl, cheerily. "What! what! Tears? Oh, come now, my dear, you must not give way. If you do we'll all join in, and that would be too depressing. Get in, Donald, lad."

Mr. Baxcombe did so, his father slammed the door, pausing for a moment to whisper a blessing, signed to the postillions, and the coach started. The bride made a quick motion as though she would escape, and then sank back, quivering. Her husband laid a caressing hand upon her arm. All the way up the drive they were showered with rice by the tenantry.

"God bless yer, sir, an' yer lady! God bless yer!" cried the old servitor at the gate. The coach lurched into the highway and sped down the Stafford road, Mr. Broughton trotting by its side, cheering with merry badinage.

The girl, her eyes fixed on the seat before her,

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paid no attention to the conversation or the fleeting landscape. Once her husband said:

“Mr. Broughton is addressing you, madame.”

She forced herself to utter a commonplace reply, and then lapsed into lassitude again. Fear benumbed her, mind and body—not fear of physical maltreatment, but of the prospective lives of those who builded everything upon this. She keenly felt how little there was to bind her to her husband, and how much depended upon the alliance. Here was a marriage, devoid of all affection on one side, of which was hoped the same beneficent fruition as that blossoming from the wedlock of propinquity and love; barren soil was asked to take seed and bloom.

At the Hall Mr. Broughton bade them adieu, and wished them a fair journey. The quaint old place, with its sloping lawns, its manor-house, rich in association, and its huge oak-trees, lay basking in the sun. As the coach climbed the crest of a gentle gradient Broughton waved them a last farewell; then they dipped into the decline, passed from view, and for miles rode in silence.

Presently, grasping her hands, he said: “Dear little girl, you are very pretty and not very wise. I can wait. Will it be for long?”

His gaze was ardent, and she strove to recover her hands.

“I am afraid it will be, Donald.”

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“Then you won’t give a hungry man a consoling crumb?” he begged, gently drawing her towards him.

“No,” she said. “Please let me go!”

“Won’t you?”

She tugged fiercely to be free, but, drawing her closer, he kissed her full upon the lips, saying:

“Hungry men are awful thieves.”

She wiped her lips, and he laughed outright.

“You tempt me to place another there.”

“You should not yield to temptation,” she replied, with fugitive eyes. “A strong man should be stronger than any temptation.”

“The potential is a wonderful mood,” he said, dryly. “Why, thirty years ago an abduction was a compliment, no disgrace; and you have it that things have so declined that a kiss is a sin.”

“Do not be foolish, please,” the girl exclaimed.

Leaning forward and placing a firm hand over her trembling one, he said, tenderly:

“This is no my ain lassie,  
Fair tho’ the lassie be.  
Weel ken I my ain lassie—  
Kind love is in her e’e.”

And then, as though ashamed of the exhibition, he threw himself heavily against the cushions, observing shortly:

“We lunch at Coventry.”

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She stole a sly glance and said nothing.

“I dare say you will enjoy the town—London, I mean,” he went on, to cover the awkward break. “I should think to a girl reared as you have been the opportunity of seeing such sights as the city offers would be a source of the greatest delight. It is another hemisphere, as it were. Dress is different, manners are utterly so, the people are another people.”

“I am afraid I shall do you little credit.”

“After we have attended to the sartorial, the rest can be trusted at St. James’s,” he said, and his pride in her brought blushes to her cheeks.

“It will be a novelty to me,” he added, with a short laugh, “to prepare your social status. My acquaintances belong to the West End, but that is no great criterion of their morals. I shall have to resurrect our family friends; the others can scarce be invited to meet you.”

“Were they—are you ashamed of them?” she asked.

“Dear me!” he replied, grimacing: “they never signified that much to me. You and they would have nothing in common; that’s the total of it. You would despise them, and they you; they are not so bad as some, but you are better than most; ergo, you are better apart.”

“And you, Donald?”

“And I likewise. I suppose I’ll not care for

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the resurrected ones at first. Well, I can relapse for a night, a month, as I will and it pleases me. I dare say 'twill please me every once in a while until you love me."

"Will you make that your excuse?"

"Pardonnez - moi!" he laughed. "I am not yet making them."

The girl bit her lip.

"Coventry is right ahead. But we are going too fast in all that, little woman. First of all, you must see the town—the public buildings, Drury Lane and Covent Garden theatres, Astley's, the wax-works, the hundred of other things that make London a huge Bartholomew Fair. After your drawing-room I will take you to the levees. We'll try for a card to Willis's Rooms, although there's small chance of our getting it at present; and after you have gone the rounds 'twill be time enough to settle down to the routine of écarté, drum-major, and mask. Lud! what a life 'twill be for you!—what a life!"

"And when we do settle down," she said—"please let it be soon—you will turn to your work again, will you not?"

"God bless me, child!" Mr. Baxcombe replied, "I never work. When painting becomes work I quit and go to the play."

"But you will work now? Ah, Donald, you can't disappoint us all."

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"My dear little girl," he responded, as the coach swung into the court of the Hen and Chickens, "I am as I am."

"But I am going to mould you," she said, prettily.

Nevertheless, when they were again on the road, and the Honorable Donald, with a copy of the *Gazette* across his bleary eyes, snored resonantly, her heart sank. With this as a beginning, what would follow?

## X

SHORTLY after six he awoke and found his wife dozing. It was growing cold, so he wrapped the rugs more closely about her, and idly turned the pages of the paper; but it was too dark to read, and, tossing it aside, he lounged against the cushions.

At Oxford, their next stop, where they would put up for the night, he would meet his college cronies, who would expect bacchanalia, as of yore. The prospect was not refreshing, because of his honest determination to do better; but a refusal, he realized, would be set to the conjugal score. Like all men of untried strength, he abhorred the idea, and so resolved to be a good fellow for the one more time, and then have done.

As he noted his wife's sweet face a thrill of pride and responsibility surged over him. Sighing, she shifted her position, and tenderly he tucked the rugs about her again, brushing her soft cheek with his lips as he did so.

"Where are we?" she asked, aroused by the caress.

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“About three miles from Oxford. We spend the night at the Angel. I’ve sent an express ahead to reserve us two rooms.”

She thanked him with her eyes.

“I’m afraid, dear, I sha’n’t be able to see much of you. Of course, we’ll dine together, but afterwards I shall have to be below stairs. There are so many chaps I have chummed with, you know. Shall you mind?”

She shivered, but responded in the negative.

“If you are timid, I dare say I could—”

“No,” she said, “I shall never come between you and your friends. One’s old friends should always be granted the preference. I shall not be afraid.”

“Of course, there’s nothing to be afraid of. I wish you would not refer to me in that way. It is in the worst of taste. ’Fore Gad! if you are to look at it in that way I don’t see why I should consider you.”

She answered nothing, and he sulked until they were bumping down the streets of Oxford; then, leaning out of the window, he frantically waved his beaver to a group of youngsters wearing the cap and gown of the university.

With wild cries of, “Bax! Bax! Good old Bax!” they sprang to the coach. One climbed upon the luggage strapped to the rear; two

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clung to the folding-steps, and another leaped to the back of the leader and rode with the postilion. So they made their way, chattering like magpies, through staid Oxford. The two men on the steps leaned through the windows and insisted upon being introduced to the dismayed Lady Baxcombe.

“Delighted to meet you, madame,” said one of them, soberly. “You were a very brave young woman to marry Bax.”

“We are going to steal him for this evening, madame,” said the other. “You must hope for the best.”

Meanwhile Mr. Rawdon, upon the leader, had been lustily yelling: “Bax! Bax! Make way all ye! King Bax has come to his own! Rally around King Bax, all ye sturdy men-at-arms! Bax! Bax!”

So when the coach wheeled into High Street its escort had grown into the hundreds, all of whom were shouting at the top of their lungs. At South Street a town-and-gown riot seemed imminent, but the gowns were too plentiful, and the townsmen sought reinforcements. Two turnings from the Angel a union was effected with some hundred odd ‘varsity men who had been awaiting the Honorable Donald’s arrival at the inn. They promptly toppled Rawdon in the mud, cut the traces, and pulled the coach into

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the court-yard. By this time the girl was thoroughly terrified.

"Have no fear, madame," said the man who had first spoken; "not a hair of our captive's head shall be touched to his injury. We are wild men, but not bloodthirsty."

At a preconcerted signal the air grew white with flour, the groom was seized and lifted to the shoulders of two men, the bride was hustled into a sedan, and the triumphant progress to the bridal-chamber was begun. It was only by force of arms that Baxcombe finally cleared the room and bolted and locked the door. His beaver was crushed beyond recognition, his muslin scarf hung down the back of his ruined coat, and he had but one boot, but he was happy.

"'Fore Gad!" he said, thoughtlessly—"fore Gad! it makes me homesick."

His wife, her attire scarcely disarranged, was nervously tapping her foot.

"What do you think of it, Hattie?"

She surveyed him disdainfully.

"I think that if I were a man I'd be a man."

"'Pon honor," he roared, "so do I! There's scarce a doubt of it."

"I mean," she said, biting her lip, "I'd try to protect my wife. I wouldn't let a pack of rowdies ill-treat her while I sat by and twiddled my thumbs."

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His eyes narrowed. "Go slow," he said. "These chaps are my friends."

"I would be ashamed to own them."

"See here," he said, incisively, "I'll not permit you to criticise them. There was more warm-heartedness in that crowd than you will find in all London. They love me, and I love them. They're my friends, in thick and thin. I'll not have you sneering at them. Mind, I'll not have it!"

His voice was vibrant, and for several moments he stood looking down upon her. Then he resumed, in a light-hearted tone:

"Come, dear, this is too early to quarrel. Let us have dinner instead."

During the meal he chatted of London and his acquaintances there, until from decorous disinterest she degenerated into animated attention.

"What does he look like—this Brummell?" she inquired.

"A face a foot and a half long, half of that forehead; lightish hair."

She grimaced.

"But you should see his eyes—most dev'lish eyes in England; 'pon honor! They can say anything, from a 'Don't know you' to a 'Te Deum.'"

"Is he so wonderful?"

"Wonderful! Why, the man has three glov-

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ers—one cuts the thumbs and the other two fit and sew them; three hair-dressers; and two bootmakers, one for each foot."

"And is that the acme of attainment?" she asked, merrily.

"Being wonderful?"

"No, a plurality of dressers."

"Sometimes you make me believe in reincarnation," her husband said, half quizzically; "else how the devil could such a phrase as 'a plurality of dressers' have blossomed from Ashley soil? It may not be the acme of attainment, but it is vastly essential. Time was when dress proclaimed a man. In the good days of this kingdom none but gentlemen dared strap swords to their thighs nor wear Duvillier wigs. The wig was the first to go, and the sword followed, so to-day the fold of the neckerchief, the fit of the glove, the hang of the coat are the distinguishing bits between a draper's apprentice and a man of fashion."

"They only distinguish in the streets."

"We have no apprentices in our drawing-rooms. But I dare say the time will come when 'twill be impossible to tell a gentleman from a lackey until one or t'other opens his mouth. The trend is all that way. Meanwhile, Mr. Brummell deserves the greatest credit for keeping us on the *qui vive*."

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It seems to me the less thought spent on clothes the more for serious things," the girl said. "I don't know which is right—whether men have grown more sober because of their clothes, or whether clothes have grown sober along with the men; but society is better than it used to be, is it not?"

"Is it better? I don't believe it. To-day every man—tradesmen, farmers, apothecaries—is an esquire. Servants address their masters in the third person, as a common thing, instead of as 'my master,' 'my mistress,' or 'my lord.' A few weeks ago a friend of mine wrote me that he went to Drury one evening, and in the next box to his there sat a fellow who had that morning applied for hire as a cook. The same damaging equality is obtruding itself everywhere. If you mean that the language of the day is more veiled, you are possibly right. It is true that we have discarded such words as 'belly,' 'colic,' and 'bowels' in favor of the sweeping stomach and its woes; that instead of calling a spade a spade we speak of 'fair Cyprians' and 'tender' or 'interesting connections'; but the spade is a spade, nevertheless. But, Lud! child, here I am arguing as with an authority; and how came it about? What do you know, eh? Is it those musty magazines again, with their 'debates in a newly organized

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society,' and their sonnets to weeping damsels on the death of their song-birds? I see it is," he laughed. "You should talk to Archie, my dear. According to him the great millennium is at hand; and the only fault which can be found with the theory is that it isn't true."

"Is your brother in London?" she asked.

"No. Archie is still with the embassy at Vienna. You should have married him. He is the pride of the family, quite."

She had arisen, and, coming towards him and laying one hand upon his shoulder, she said:

"And some time we are going to be proud of you, aren't we, Donald?"

"Which means you are not proud now?"

She shook her pretty head.

"Sometimes I am, but not in the way I wish. But that does not worry me, because I have faith in you."

He looked into her eyes, wondering at how much she had grown. She met his gaze smilingly, and continued:

"I want you to promise me something."

"Well?" he said.

"Promise me not to drink more than one bottle to-night."

"Can't," he said, decisively. "Really."

"Is it too much to ask?"

"Yes. And too little to drink."

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With a sigh she dropped her hand, and he caught and pressed it.

“Don’t try that, little girl. If I promised, I shouldn’t keep it, and I never make promises of that kind.”

Immediately afterwards his friends began to drop in by twos and threes. Lady Baxcombe was most gracious, to Donald’s delight, and the university men apologized for their conduct, declaring that they were so carried away at sight of their beloved associate as to be irresponsible.

“I wish you would make that husband of yours work, my lady,” said one of the professors, whose strong attachment for Donald nothing had undermined. “If I am any judge of color, he is destined to rank among the foremost.”

“Won’t you please tell him so, and urge him for me?” she said, so earnestly that the good man scrutinized the pretty face before replying.

“I am sure no influence could vie with that of your ladyship, but I will speak to him.”

The girl evinced such tact and *aplomb* that the verdict of approval was unanimous, and the first toast below-stairs was altered to read:

“To the very best fellow and the very best girl! Drink it, lads, and down!”

Two-score Oxford men bent upon an evening of jollity can accomplish marvels of consumption. Toast after toast followed in rapid suc-

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cession, and were accompanied by bumpers of champagne which shamed the memory of the worthy burgomaster who swallowed three quarts at a gulp to save Rothenburg.

In the then deserted room Lady Baxcombe listened, behind barred doors, to the uproar below, and trembled. She knew that her husband, by repute, was a debauchee, but debauchery took upon itself, on acquaintance, a far more lurid and terrible light than she had anticipated. She dreaded the effects of his potations as only an innocent woman could. Without, the streets were quiet and deserted. Soon the logs on the hearth dwindled to a handful of glowing embers, but she bore the cold rather than unlock the door. Bed was not to be thought of. At each peal of boisterous laughter she shuddered, and thanked Heaven that there were two rooms instead of one.

The drinking song, "Derry Down," to the air of which they were singing the words of the American philosopher, Franklin, was making the night a bedlam.

"The Antediluvians were all very sober,  
For they had no wine and they brewed no October.  
All wicked, bad living, on mischief still thinking,  
For there can't be good living where there isn't good  
drinking.

Derry Down.

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“ ‘Twas honest old Noah first planted the vine,  
And mended his morals by drinking its wine,  
And justly the drinking of water decried,  
For he knew that all mankind, by drinking it, died.  
Derry Down.”

The place was so full of smoke that to see across the room was impossible. Good-humor sat easily at the festive board, but its quality deteriorated as faces grew more flushed and eyes more bloodshot, until it became apparent that things were soon to develop into drunken rowdyism; so gay Polly, the barmaid, left the young gentlemen to the service of the lackeys.

At two in the morning the proprietor, with fear in his bosom, announced that, by order of the proctors, the place must be closed. A howl of derision greeted him.

“ I am most regretful, sirs. I am sure your honors will appreciate my position and go quietly,” said the poor man.

No one paying any further attention to him, he continued, with more dignity:

“ Gentlemen, I must ask you to leave. I am sorry, but I must close the house.”

“ Well, close and be damned!” roared a student.

“ Get out!” shouted a dozen others.

Shrugging his shoulders, the landlord whispered to the head lackey, and then left the

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room. The bedlam continued for half an hour, when there was a cry for more wine.

“Bring up another dozen, Barker,” said Rawdon.

The flunky politely replied that there was no more.

“What!” yelled two-score voices. The clinking of glasses ceased; the quiet grew impressive.

“Did I understand you to say, Barker, that there is no more wine?” said Rawdon, speaking slowly, in order that he might articulate correctly.

“I’m sorry, sir,” the man replied.

“‘Tis a demn lie!” screamed a boy of nineteen, whose cheeks were purple.

The Honorable Donald laid a restraining hand upon the lad’s arm and arose unsteadily.

“Send for Dexter,” he commanded.

Dexter was the landlord, and came promptly.

“Of course,” said King Bax, “we know that you are bounding us about the wine, Dexter, and—”

“Mr. Baxcombe, sir—”

“And,” he continued, chillingly, “I’m going to invite these gentlemen to my own apartment, where, of course, we shall be served; otherwise I’ll have the law on you. I’m no longer an Oxford man, but a private gentleman who demands to be served. Come, men! I dare say

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madame has retired, so we will do without 'Derry Down.'"

She listened, with wildly beating heart, to their uncertain steps as they ascended the stairs. With her frail body doubly bolting the door, she heard men stumble and laugh sillily; and she had been but two days married! She could have screamed. The room was cold, yet the perspiration stood upon her brow in beads.

It was daylight when the revellers took their departure. When the last had gone she heard her husband stumbling over the empty bottles on his way to bed, and she cried—cried like a little baby.

## XI

THE Golden Cross Hotel, in Charing Cross, to which Mr. Baxcombe drove upon arriving in London, if not as noted as the higher-priced Star and Garter in Pall Mall, was quite comfortable, and possessed the attraction of being a well-known coaching-house. Coaches of all degrees were constantly rumbling under the *porte-cochère*—coaches with scarlet bodies and yellow wheels, coaches with shining black bodies and orange wheels, coaches of blue, of cream, of drab, of every conceivable hue, with drivers in all conceivable liveries sitting on seat-cloths of canvas-cloth, velvet, or, when their masters were men of wealth, upon cloths of plush embroidered and fringed with silver. What a concatenation the horns and bells and horses' hoofs must have made!

Above the leaded panes of the coffee-room windows, and embedded in a recess, was a huge, gilt Maltese cross, above which the hotel towered to four stories, and was topped off irregularly in the likeness of a rickety flight of steps. Some

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of the windows were without copings and flat at the top; others were rounded off like niches in a cathedral, but the general effect was engaging, and the hostelry had earned a repute second to none.

Immediately after the Honorable Donald had been assigned rooms he broached the subject of suitable costume.

“I will drop into a shop in Bond Street and tell them to send a woman up. Do not be afraid to order what you need, and you need everything. If you take my advice, you’ll trust very largely to the girl they send.”

“Shall you be gone long?”

“I dare say quite a while,” he said, as she helped him into his flounced cape-coat. “I must go to the guv’nor’s agents, and from there to my tailor.”

“Do you need clothes?”

“Do you think I intend visiting him?” he drawled, as he picked up his beaver and gold-topped stick. “For Heaven’s sake, don’t talk to me like that! I hate parsimony. On the way back I’ll stop in and see about a maid for you, and I’ll probably drop around the coffee-houses. To-morrow I’ll take you about a bit.”

“Don’t—don’t you think I might do without the maid?” she persisted.

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But the Honorable Donald said, with amusing savagery:

"My dear, there are no cows to milk and no wild violets to pluck in these pastures. This is not Ashley; this is civilization, thank God!"

At the door he hesitated.

"I want to tell you that I am beastly sorry about last night. I dare say it cut you up a bit."

"Yes," she said, quietly, "it did."

"Of course. You see, dear, those things seem worse to you because you are not used to them. I am, and—"

"Yes," she said. "That is the trouble."

"'Fore Gad!" he broke off—"everything considered, you are mighty virtuous, my word!" and slammed the door.

A hackney-coach carried him down the Strand and into Fleet Street, where was the banking establishment of Child. Here, until it was absorbed in 1788 by the banking-house, stood the famed Devil Tavern, with its curious sign-board of St. Dunstan tweaking the devil's nose. In 1800, however, not a trace remained of it; only the wit of its select coterie was destined to live and endure.

From Fleet Street Baxcombe proceeded to Grub Street in search of Mr. Butterick. Musty bookshops lined the narrow way and protruded

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into the thoroughfare; hack writers and public scriveners, unkempt and odoriferous, rubbed elbows with him, and occasionally a gentleman of fashion, on an intellectual pilgrimage, smiled deprecatingly upon him. Yet, with all its stenches and squalor, Grub Street was the *alma mater* of genius; despite its exterior, the lore of ages reposed upon its shelves. Goldsmith stooped in Grub Street to conquer in Pall Mall.

“Mr. Butterick’s out,” said the dowdy factotum.

“When will he be in?”

“Can’t tell; but I dare say you’ll find him up to Cheshire Cheese;” and to the Cheshire Cheese, a rambling tavern in a little, unkempt court-yard of its own, Mr. Baxcombe repaired.

After stumbling through the devious turnings, which were as much a part of the Cheshire Cheese’s repute as its Cheddar puddings, he found himself in the tiny smoking-room to which the waiter had referred him. In one corner, behind a mug of ale, sat a little, shrivelled-up man, who said, in a quaking voice, that he had heard some one inquiring for him, but was too comfortable to go see who it was.

“Oh yes,” he added, sharply, after hearing his visitor’s name, “I got a letter day before yesterday about you. Craigmarnock says you

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can draw. Well, Craigmarnock ought to know. Got any sketches with you?"

"No, I didn't bring the portfolio. I have too many places to go."

"Too many places to go—too many places to go," mused Mr. Butterick, batting his shaggy eyebrows. "Too many places to go."

Putting down his tankard of ale, he sat upright and fiercely declaimed:

"Young man, there's just one place to go—that's to the front. There's just one way to take—Hard Work Lane; and you've got to carry a portfolio of poverty and want and despair. You young fellows think all you need is a heaven-sent mission and a piece of chalk; but, by God! you're wrong. The heaven-sent mission's all right; the chalk's all right; but it's backbone that wins the R.A."

"I thought you sold pictures?" said Baxcombe, quietly.

"Heh?"

"I thought you sold pictures," he repeated—"not advice?"

The old man chuckled.

"There's a better market for pictures," he croaked; "the other's overstocked."

"Do you want to handle my work?"

"I don't know till I see it."

"Well," said the Honorable Donald, "I am

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stopping at the Golden Cross. You may see it there."

"I'm afraid, young man," said Mr. Butterick, tartly, "that it 'll never see Grub Street if you wait for me to go up to the Cross and fetch it."

"You don't know but what you are spurning a Watteau," Baxcombe laughingly said, as he picked up his beaver and stick.

"No," chuckled the old dealer; "but I do know that Watteau lived on fifteen francs a month and a daily dish of soup. That beaver would have kept him a quarter-year."

He watched the fine gentleman disappear down the crooked stairs.

"If he's got it in him," he said to himself, "he'll be back again, and if he 'ain't got it in him it ain't worth my while a-going to him," with which bit of philosophy he drained his tankard.

But the Honorable Donald had no idea of returning to Grub Street. His pockets were well lined with guineas; there was a thousand at Child's upon which he could draw with certainty, and many thousands at the faro-banks upon which he might draw if luck favored him. If the worst came to the worst, the Shylocks of 'Change Alley would readily advance, either upon his unsecured note or upon his prospective share in the paternal estate.

On his way to the Prince of Wales coffee-

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house he stopped for a moment at his tailor's and for a few minutes at his haberdasher's; then set forth, care free, for the world of club-land. Already the atmosphere of the city was intoxicating him.

"Gad!" he murmured, over and over. "'Fore Gad! but it's good to breathe this air!"

Yet he was battling with the desire for frivolity, which in his day had a different meaning from that which it now enjoys. It was not that he loved his wife, but because he loved himself, that he fought at all. It was the idea of baring his habits to the gaze of any one, man or woman, stranger or friend, that revolted him. That it did revolt him was singular enough in an era when so brilliant a statesman as Pitt saw no disgrace in appearing before the House in a state of palpable inebriation; whose friends implored him to show himself in public with a woman of the town lest he hazard his career by seeming to run counter to the customs of the day. Mr. Baxcombe, however, possessed an undercurrent of acute sensitiveness, which made him his own most bitter denunciator. Had he lived in a less Georgian age it is entirely probable that he would have escaped the quicksands, but the inclination, bred of the artistic temperament which nurtured the sensibility, would still have existed. He was barometric by birth.

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At the coffee-house he was besieged by fops who had heard the particulars of the dum-founding of Temple, and drawn their own deductions.

"I say," roared Lord Hampton, "is she with you, Bax? 'Fore Gad! gentlemen, we must pay our respects."

"Her ladyship will be delighted, Hampton. We are temporarily at the Golden Cross."

His lordship felt for his wineglass.

"Did I understand you to say her—her ladyship?" he inquired. Then, raising his glass, he pledged her ladyship's health.

"Sink me if I ever heard of such a thing," mumbled the young Duke of Loring, beneath whose jacket reposed too much claret.

"To what does your grace refer?" said the Honorable Donald.

"Why," stuttered the Duke, "I said that I—I never—never—demme, lemme go sleep!" which he promptly did, and began to snore.

Lady Baxcombe at that moment was gazing in despair upon three huge hampers which were being lugged into her room under the direction of a shop-woman from Rigardo's, in Bond Street.

"I hope your ladyship will find something suitable," the young person said, as she unlocked the hampers; "but, you see, so much depends upon the individuality of the costume.

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If we only had time to study your personality we could do you better justice. It is a pity! Oh, I beg pardon; this is all hats; the gowns are in the other. How stupid of me!"

"I desire a very modest outfit, you know."

"Yes? Well, we can outfit you very nicely from two hundred and fifty pounds. His honor said you would require a hair-dresser, so I sent word to Tortoni, in the Piazza. He is very good, they say. This is a lovely promenade costume, Lady Baxcombe, and it will be very becoming to you; so few can really wear pink."

The gown was of white muslin, over which a cloak of pink silk, covered with black crêpe and trimmed with black lace, was to be worn.

"But it is far too late in the season for this," said Hattie. "I must have something heavy and warm."

"Your ladyship's pardon," said the woman; "but the robe is in the very height of the mode. It is now the fashion to wear the thinnest fabrics, no matter how cold the weather. With this suit goes this fancy hat of white straw. See how dainty the ribbons make it! And this exquisite bearskin muff; for full dress white muffs are de rigueur, but for the promenade ladies cling to bear, marten, and red fox. May I ring for your woman to assist you?"

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I have no woman as yet," her ladyship said, simply.

"Oh, then, may I? They are so difficult to keep, are they not? Lady Jersey has had no less than five in the past four months," the girl said, tactfully. Her services had been often requisitioned, but in such cases the customer's tenure was usually that of caprice.

"Of course, you may wear any color over white, and by taking several cloaks your ladyship will have as many costumes. In a moment I will show you a lovely pelisse in azure sarsenet trimmed with ermine. With that a white Leghorn bonnet trimmed with blue ribbons would look well—possibly with a tuft of feathers springing from a big bow. You know, classic drapery is the mode in France now, and it is carried to the greatest extremes. The fans I have brought your ladyship are printed in figures from Greecian mythology—some of them are very lovely. Then I have with me a yellow pelisse," the girl prattled on, seeing that her patron did not take offence, and surmising that her trained taste was in demand, "with plain, close sleeves, and an edging of fur about the neck, cuffs, and bottom. It fastens with large, gilt buttons. Will you take a look in the glass, my lady?"

Timidly raising her eyes, for she thought she never had seemed such a fool, Lady Baxcombe

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confronted an image which bore the family resemblance, but otherwise was far too lovely to be recognizable.

“If you prefer the gown to cling tighter, the muslin may be slightly dampened; but, then, 'tis likely to give one cold.”

Blushing at this and facing the shop-girl, her ladyship said, frankly:

“You must have seen that I am ignorant of the modes. This is beautiful; but am I really expected to wear gauze in winter? I shall freeze.”

“One soon becomes accustomed to it. Clothes are warm or not as we become accustomed to heavy or light stuffs. It is all in that; and as to the fashion, the gown was made for Mrs. Fitzherbert, and left on our hands because of a dispute over the price. Everything is being sacrificed to flowing drapery, my lady; as little underclothing is worn as possible. The whole thing now, your ladyship, is to have the figure *au naturel*. A few years ago the hoop was the mode; now hoops are never seen except at court.”

The costume was put aside, together with the yellow and blue pelisses, and the energies of the shop-woman were devoted to a ball-and-theatre gown which brought Hattie's heart to her throat. It was of pink sarsenet trimmed with running

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wreaths of jasmine, and with it was worn a French apron of Paris net.

"Is it not rather low?"

"It suits you most charmingly. If you will permit me, your ladyship's shoulders are far too beautiful to hide. Much depends on the contour and whiteness of the throat and bust. The robe needs but one thing—this silver cord, so—to girdle the waist—and the swans'-down muff."

From the glitter of the cut-steel rosettes in her dainty slippers to the deep pink of her full lips and the sparkle of her violet eyes the picture was ethereal.

"It—it is beautiful," she agreed, and the gown was added to the heap upon the chair, and to it, later, a pelerine, a black satin mantle, a pair of "fire-color" velvet shoes, and a pair of pink ditto, a white sarcenet robe, three reticules, three hand-painted fans, six pairs of long gloves, and a snow mountain of lingerie.

The hair-dresser, in turn, discussed with her ladyship the relative merits of the coiffures *à la Grecque*, the turban, and the "flowing curls," leaving behind him by sheer force of character a stock of cosmetics for which his rose-hued patron had no need, and knew it.

He even suggested false eyebrows, of slightly greater arch than her ladyship's own, vowing

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that by means of his special paste their adhesion was assured.

At last it was over, and with a heart full of conflicting emotions the little girl, *grande dame* no longer, sat down in the midst of her new possessions. It was with difficulty that she realized the change in her position. The shimmering and warm-hued silks delighted and half terrified her. They were the first tangible presentments of the awe-inspiring world of fashion. With trembling fingers she held them to her cheeks and draped them before the mirror. Hastily slipping off her bodice, she improvised a *décolleté* blouse from a scarf of cream satin embroidered with rosebuds. This she bound with velvet ribbon, which she knotted upon her shoulders, and as she noted the effect, to the charm of which her dimpled bust lent much, her blue eyes grew wide.

"I didn't know I was so pretty," she murmured. "Mayhap he will, after all."

Every variation of colors afforded her new delight, and not until the flunky knocked at the door to inquire whether he should light the candles did she realize that the day was almost gone and her spouse not returned.

Mr. Baxcombe, in the best of humors, was then leaving Brook's, where he had exchanged a few words with a member of the ministry. Having

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taken but little wine, he decided to walk to the Golden Cross.

His wife was making her toilet, so he idly turned over the articles left by Rigardo.

“Are you going out to-night, Donald?” she inquired, as she entered the room.

“I have an invitation to join a set of fellows at the Cocoa-Tree.”

“Where is the Cocoa-Tree?”

“Oh, you would not know, dear, if I told you. I am not going. I have made up my mind to stay at home with you,” he said, playfully.

She turned towards him, and wistfully asked: “Do you want to stay?”

## XII

DURING the following week she found her husband an exemplar of gallants. St. James's Park, the Abbey, Parliament, the Tower, St. Paul's, Hyde Park, and the Row were interestingly explained to her by both the Honorable Donald and Sir Rodney Lynn, a gentleman introduced by Baxcombe as his dearest friend, one whom he felt privileged to bring into his home without bar or reserve.

The three extended their excursions to include all the sights of London, and whatever monotony there might have been for Lady Baxcombe's custodians was dispelled by her naïve delight in each revelation of this, to her, strange world. Sir Rodney thought that never had there been such innocence, and continually marvelled at her disregard for architectural beauty as contrasted with her childish pleasure in such bits as the mechanical antics of old Mother Shipton at Mrs. Salmon's Wax Works. Yet there was nothing remarkable in the contrast. A house was a house, no matter how grand and stately or how

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beautiful, and she had seen many houses; but an old woman, of the same composition as a candle, who kicked out as lustily as any flesh-and-blood dame, was something she had never dreamed of; so it held the greater attraction.

Of evenings the Honorable Donald would dwell upon the splendors of Ranelagh, then closed for the winter; upon the frivolities of Vauxhall, or, chalk in hand, would resurrect for her items from the past which she persisted in conceiving as vivid present. Few men could be more fascinating than Baxcombe, and the greatest incentive his temperament could have lay in the knowledge that a woman reared in the seclusion of a curacy could resist him. Every play of feature, gesture, and intonation of which he was master he brought to bear upon his wife. She would not have been human had she remained unimpressed, but she was sufficiently decided in her course of action not to succumb.

When a particularly clever bit of chalk-work elicited her admiration he flushed with a delight new to his *blasé* disposition, and labored harder upon another.

“Oh! Splendid, splendid, Donald!” she once exclaimed. “It is perfectly true to life.”

“It is not bad,” he admitted.

“Bad!” she exclaimed, her voice vibrant with emotion. “The only bad thing is that

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you are content to sit and hold your hands. Oh, Donald! It is almost a crime to waste such heaven-sent genius. Why will you not work?"

"My dear little goose, haven't I been working all this blessed evening, doing bits for you?"

"Yes, bits—bits—bits, but nothing to draw you from yourself." Suddenly she paused and gazed into the fire. "I wish you cared for me."

The bit of chalk fell from his hand and was shattered to atoms. A week is a short time within which to love, but the Honorable Donald was a young man, and his wife a most beautiful woman.

"How do you know but what I do?" he said, ardently.

"Every woman knows," she said, quickly.

"Why do you wish I did?" he said, after a moment.

Her eyes flashed. "So that you would be aroused," she said, "to a realization of what there is in life for men who work. So that you would slave as every man must slave who would achieve."

"Is that all?"

"Oh, Donald! Isn't that enough?"

"Is it all?"

"I don't think I understand."

"I mean is that your only reason for desiring my love?"

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“It is the chief reason.”

He watched the logs flare up and scatter sparks.

“After all,” he said, “I have gained something. For the second time you have forgotten yourself and thought of me. Suppose I tell you I do love you?”

“Ah, don’t,” she whispered.

“Suppose I put it differently, then, and tell you that I intend to work for you when you are willing to do love’s work for me.”

“I want to do everything I can,” she said, wistfully. “I want to help you in every possible way, and retard you in not a single one.”

“I wish you cared for me,” he said, slowly.

She flushed to the tips of her ears.

“I wish you cared for me, because that is the one thing which will urge me forward.”

In all his twenty-three years of life the Honorable Donald had never experienced so eloquent a gaze.

“It isn’t that,” his wife said, gently. “You want me to love you for another reason—to please your vanity.”

“Ah, is that it?” he said, stupidly. “Is it, indeed?”

She nodded.

“So you see we understand each other, and it isn’t worth our while to pretend, is it?”

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"I was not pretending," he said, following her with his eyes as she moved across the room. At any rate, it was that degree of pretence which is acceptable to conscience where pretty women are concerned.

"'Fore Gad! I'm not, Hattie,'" he burst out, with a show of genuine warmth. "You are the one who doesn't care," and she laughed a merry, tinkling laugh that was the quintessence of diplomacy.

The pleasurable evenings usually ended so. After all, her world was in him, and it was a temptation to snatch at the moment's happiness, but she felt that his career depended upon her power of inthraldom. Just so long as she seemed above him he would struggle; once she surrendered, the cause was lost.

So far, there was no room to doubt the intensity of his desire to please. Her wishes, however veiled, were sure to out and be gratified.

"I haven't been blind to your longing for the playhouse," he said one afternoon.

"Oh, I—"

"It is not criminal outside of Ashley," he smiled; "and of all your musty lore that of the stage seems pre-eminent. I have been waiting because I did not suppose you would care for Shakespeare, but Lynn tells me he has a box

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at Drury for to-night. Kemble plays Hamlet, and the Prince is to attend. Shall we go?"

Go they did, and in fine style, Hattie looking mightily handsome, her cheeks aglow and eyes aglitter from excitement. Not a stick nor stone nor dab of gold paint was there about the edifice which was not hallowed, in her eyes, through the memory of actors and actresses famed but gone. In yonder box, the royal one, had slept the King of Denmark, until aroused by Mrs. Bellamy's scornful play upon the line, "Oh, most noble lord"; behind that curtain lay the rostrum—the shape and appearance of which her ladyship was as ignorant of as a babe new-born—whereon the immortal Garrick had moved to laughter and wrought to tears.

About and beneath her sat the world of fashion, dominated by the lovely Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, holding court before the play began; near to her grace the Honorable Donald pointed out Mrs. Fitzherbert, Selwyn, Sheridan, and Fox. In a box across the auditorium was the lovely Lady Sarah Napier, and, by her, Lady O'Brien. To the prattle of voices were united the rustle of silks, the snapping of fans, the warning notes from the musical instruments, and about it all hovered the incense of perfumery, "like a box of essences broken in the air."

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The orchestra began the national anthem, and as George Frederick, debauchee and Prince of Wales, entered the royal *loge*, the house, of one accord, arose. With his Highness were the Duke of Queensberry and Sir John Lade.

"Men of no repute," observed Mr. Baxcombe. "The Prince bows gracefully, despite his fat."

"Would you have all virtues barred?" said Sir Rodney. "Egad! We've caught the royal eye."

The curtain was drawn, and what mattered it to Kemble's auditors, least of all to her glowing ladyship, that he dressed the Dane in a black velvet court-suit of the latest cut, decorated with the star and ribbon of the Order of the Garter, and wore his hair powdered. It was Hamlet as there never had been Hamlet before. The audience hung upon every word and breathed during the pauses.

"His Royal Highness, sir," said Sir John Lade to Mr. Baxcombe, at the end of the first act, "is pleased to request your presence in the royal box."

Flushing with pleasure at the attention, the Honorable Donald excused himself and followed Sir John to the royal presence.

"Ah!" drawled George. "The son of Lord Tweeddale, I believe. Mr. Baxcombe, we are so impressed with the charm of your companion

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that we would know more of so lovely a lady. Do I embarrass you by inquiring her name?"

"Instead, your Highness flatters me. The lady is my wife."

"Indeed!" said the Prince, well pleased, since married women were his pet mistresses. "I was not aware you had taken a wife;" by which bit of intimate information he flattered the Honorable Donald all the more.

"You must bring Lady Baxcombe to my next levee."

After chatting for a few moments, George inclined his head, and Mr. Baxcombe returned to her ladyship, with a new emotion in his breast. For the first time he felt the pangs of jealousy.

To his wife the playhouse, with its patrician gathering and display, was a bit of enchantment. She hung upon the utterances from the stage with childish delight and a genuine enjoyment which was foreign to the rest of the audience. During the intermissions she sat proudly by her husband's side and listened, in wonderment, to his chronicles of the great world at their elbows, wholly unconscious of the attention her naïve beauty was attracting. He gloried in her that night. Once he said:

"Egad! You're a dream—a dream—do you hear?" And the crimson tide that swept her brow was noted by the Prince.

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"Confusion!" he observed to Queensberry.  
"Here we have a woman who blushes."

As the curtain was drawn for the last time she sighed in sheer ecstasy, and asked: "Oh, is it over?"

"For the nonce," her husband laughed, and threw the cape about her pretty shoulders.

On the way to their home in Hanover Square —for with his usual extravagance he had taken a house, relying on the gaming-tables to support it — he told her of his conversation with the Prince.

"Oh, you must take me, Donald!" she exclaimed. "Think what it may mean for you!"

"I prefer to go down to posterity through my brush rather than through my wife. This future king of ours has not the best of reputes."

"Can you trust me?" she asked.

"Yes," he said, brusquely, "I can trust you, but not the scandal-mongers. You don't know what they are."

A few moments later the hackney-coach drew up before the footway, and he assisted her to alight. As the house door closed upon them he took her in his arms and said, tenderly: "You see, dear, I can't wait, after all. What have your lips to say to me?"

"Bad boy!" she sighed, and he kissed the lips.

### XIII

SLEEPING upon the kiss, she dreamed of the services she could render her lord and master by innocently cultivating the friendship of the Prince. Naturally, she was proud of having attracted the attention of her future king, but her first, almost her only, thought was of the benefit such an association would be to her husband once he was persuaded to labor seriously. Even had she realized the character of the heir to the throne, it is probable she would have innocently persevered for her husband's sake. Her eagerness to aid him was growing to be almost monomania. With all of her womanly heart she was prepared to work in the cause of right; yet, appreciating the difference in their social status, and her own lack of worldly charm, she dreaded the time when her powers of inthraldom would fail and he would consider her a burden. Since their marriage his demeanor had signalled the very opposite of her fears, but she saw in it only pique at his failure in the particular conquest. If, while maintaining her pose of aloofness, she

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could induce him to serious effort, she felt she could glean comfort in the future from having accomplished that much; so she resolved to attend the levee.

It must be borne in mind that the hospitality of George *fils* was a thing distinct from that of George *père*, and the Honorable Donald, while anxious to introduce his lovely wife into the latter circle, was doubly anxious to hide her loveliness from the former. Good husband, and kind, blind, docile father was George III., whose reward in life was gained in the oblivion of insanity.

From the date of his maturity the career of George Frederick had been a succession of amours, which shed but little fulgence upon his title of "the first gentleman of Europe." Perhaps Mr. Baxcombe may be excused for nourishing some doubts as to the wisdom of countenancing any association with so splendid a rake, but he would have acted under abundant precedent had he closed his eyes to whatever royalty desired. He was not, however, of that ilk, and, besides, was learning to love his wife, or to think that he did.

While they were breakfasting next morning a palace messenger brought cards to the levee at Carlton House, together with a line from the Prince, in which his Highness expressed

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the hope of meeting Lady Baxcombe on that occasion.

With a gesture of annoyance, the Honorable Donald pushed them aside.

"Are you going?" his wife asked.

"That isn't it," he said, peevishly. "The question is, are you to go?"

"Why should I not? I have never seen anything of the kind."

"I suppose you see nothing in this but a generous desire on the Prince's part to extend the courtesy of Carlton House?" he said, in jealous petulance.

"What else is there to see," she asked, with widening eyes, "except a magnificent opportunity for you to advance your interests?"

"Fore Gad! You seem to think the acquaintance of the biggest rake in Europe an honor."

"As far as I am concerned," the girl returned with dignity, "his personal repute is nothing, while his influence is everything."

"I dare say you would be delighted to have the *Gazette* say: 'His Royal Highness was pleased to notice particularly the beautiful Lady Baxcombe, whose advent at Court is destined to arouse the most furious jealousies.' Demme, madame, I'll have no such mud-slinging, I admonish you!"

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"You have no right to speak so to me," she said, with flashing eyes. "I do not believe that our future sovereign stoops to such conduct, but if he does, you are not privileged to connect me with him."

"Lord!" he vowed at sight of the tears which welled to her eyes. "I meant nothing of the kind. I was only trying to show you what the world might say. You don't know the situation as I do. It isn't to be expected that you should."

"You need not explain."

"As you please. I have tried to put it to you nicely, but you are not the kind of woman to listen to reason."

"No?"

The two looked at each other, the girl insolently, the man with half-curled lips.

"Of course," she said, finally, "you are going to take me to the levee? It would look much better, I think."

For a moment he was too dumfounded for utterance. She gazed mockingly. Verily, this was a new phase of her character. Then he laughed.

"You mean, I suppose, to force me to take you, under threat of going unattended?"

"A threat is a low thing," she said, coldly. "It is quite immaterial whether you accompany me or not."

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"It is so vastly material," he said, "that if you do attend that levee you will have to answer to me, madame."

"Pray," she retorted, "what would you do about it?"

From a sincere desire to aid him and retain his esteem, she was fast degenerating into a virago. She had wanted to attend the levee for his sake; now she determined to do so for her own. By heroic effort he restrained the passion which surged within him. Although his face was pallid, his voice was well under control when he said:

"You are not yourself, my dear. You will think better of this by the morrow."

Instead of pacifying her the remark served to further antagonize.

"It is best that I should know what you intend doing," she said, "because I shall go to Carlton House."

He proffered nothing, and, continuing, she committed the foolish, fatal error with no other idea in her little head than the last word.

"If I cannot do better, I can at least secure Sir Collyn. I dare say he is in town."

No sooner had the words left her lips than she regretted them, for their effect upon her husband was terrifying. In two strides he was confronting her, his fingers twitching in a frenzy

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of rage. She closed her eyes and, swaying, awaited the blow his whole attitude foretold. Instead, he shook her savagely and pushed her from him.

“By God!” he said, hoarsely. “I ought to horsewhip you!”

When she forced herself to look up he had gone.

The Honorable Donald was bound for the coffee-houses. That she should dare defy him! That she should not only defy but insult him by naming that scoundrel in his house! His gloves were soaked in perspiration, his eyes burned, and he had a pain across his forehead; but he might have expected it. He was a fool, an accursed, hot-headed fool, to marry the woman. He gritted his teeth and clinched his moist hands; he would wait, and she would see. The levee was three days distant; if those three days did not bring her to her knees— Suppressing an oath, he hailed a passing coach and bade the man drive to the Cocoa-Tree, in St. James’s Street.

The air cooled his brow and restored his self-possession, save for a desire to be lifted out of himself—a thing not difficult of accomplishment when George III. was king. Paying the driver, and tossing him a half-sovereign, he entered the coffee - house. Seated in a booth by the first window was Temple. Mr. Baxcombe passed

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without so much as a glance, and the loungers, who had paused in their games at prospect of a scene, returned to cards. Two drinks of brandy quieted Baxcombe's nerves, and he glanced about him in search of acquaintances. Sir Collyn was sipping chartreuse with unction; their eyes met, and the baronet bowed courteously. Without so much as a quivering lash, the Honorable Donald looked through him, and Temple, flushing, arose. It would have been too absurd, in the light of his repute, to have sought a quarrel on account of the girl, but here was an opportunity of another sort. Crossing to Baxcombe's table, he said, pleasantly, yet loud enough to be generally heard:

"I did not know of your presence in town, else—"

"Waiter," drawled Baxcombe, "I dare say this person desires a drink. A cognac, and book it to me."

The on-lookers sniggered, and a purple mantle fell over the baronet's face. Once he essayed to speak and could not.

"You shall hear from me, sir," he choked out at last.

Baxcombe paid for the brandy, added a shilling, and left the coffee-house. The dandies were convulsed with delight.

"Bravo!" said one.

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Like an animal at bay, Temple faced about.

“Sir,” he began, but, under the taunts of fifty voices, went forth, with an oath, into St. James’s.

The Honorable Donald, in lieu of a better way of spending the time until evening, sought out an acquaintance, Mr. Reggie Dickson, of No. 16 Hewitt Lane. Mr. Dickson was indolently sipping chocolate when his visitor was shown up.

“‘Fore Gad!” he cried, “if it isn’t old Bax! Sink me! I thought you were dead. Lud! I said to myself, three whole months gone by and Bax not in town! Thomas, bring Mr. Baxcombe a cup of chocolate. Great George, our king! but it’s as good as a bowl of punch to see you again. Come, tell us what’s been and what’s going to be!”

Reggie listened with amazement to Baxcombe’s recital, punctuating it now and then with varying inflections of “Lud! I say!”

“Married!” he groaned. “You, Bax? Lud! I’d as soon expect the Prince to turn parson. It’s too deuced bad—not that I’m behindhand with felicitations and all that, you know, but it puts you out of the running. And the times we are having at Brooks’s—that’s why I missed the news, we’re all so off our heads—are simply ripping, egad! Last night that confounded cad Rydcliffe lost twenty-two thousand on one turn at faro. Served him right, too. I hate the

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donkey! Never mind, you'll be back at it in six months. No offence; but it 'll have worn out by then. Lud! I know you, Bax! Don't tell me!"

Upon Baxcombe's assertion that he was not inclined to devote his remaining years to his spouse, Reggie grew hilarious and spilled chocolate on the bedquilt.

"You come with me to Brooks's, then, this evening. Lud! I'll show you play," and to hurry the dragging hours the two sat down to piquet.

"Did you hear of the suicide? 'Twas a shame, Bax. Young Torington, as fine a fellow as ever shuffled cards, blew out his brains as clear as a whistle, poor chap, and all over ten thousand. Gad! to think on't! He and Colfax were at it all night, the luck steadily against Torington; and you know he had been sailing demn close to the wind for a year. When it got up to five he was white as my neckerchief and wobbly about the lips. 'Double or quits!' says he, in a voice you could scarce hear. Colfax looked at him pretty hard, and then agreed. 'To accommodate you.' They cut for it, and Torington got a seven to the other man's knave. Gad! I took it in so I whispered that I'd stand by him—and so I would have, Gad! for twice it—but he shook his head. 'I can't pay,' he says,

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quite calmly. As you can imagine, there was something of a scene. 'My dear fellow, it's very strange. I could have,' said Colfax. And Torington went home and shot himself."

Brooks's and White's, the leading clubs of the day, were situated vis-à-vis in St. James's Street, and each possessed a balcony, from which the bloods took estimate of the *mondaines* and *demi-mondaines* who paraded below. Brooks's was Whig, and stanch Whig, too; White's was equally stanch Tory. The entrance to each was but a few steps up from the foot-path, and in each a superb stairway led to the card-rooms, and thence to the balcony, from which the supporters of White's could have tossed biscuits to their friends at Brooks's had they been of the mind. Here were to be seen the bucks of the day, in all their glory, and at ten that night the Honorable Donald and Mr. Reggie Dickson pushed their way through the throng of painted yet not unattractive women who congested on St. James's Street after sundown.

"There's Colfax now!" exclaimed the bustling Reggie, indicating a young man who was talking at the door with a fine-appearing woman of suspicious hair and cheeks.

"Ah," murmured the blood. "Glad to see you among us again, Mr. Baxcombe, indeed."

Within doors the popping of corks, the flipping

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of cards, and the snapping of counters mingled with the buzz of voices. There stood Lord Carlisle; to his left the Comte de Mironteux, and descending the stairs was his stately grace of Devonshire, husband to Georgiana, a man of such rigid honor that Johnson had been moved to say of him "that if he had promised an acorn, and not one had grown in his woods that year, he would have sent to Denmark for one."

"My wife noticed Lady Baxcombe at the play," said the Duke, cordially, "and when she came home vowed that she must and would call upon her. 'Charming' was the word she used; and when Georgiana owns that another woman is charming—" The old peer chuckled softly. "And you, Donald, you must drop around some evening. We still have the same people, informally. Not seeing you for so long, we feared you had turned Tory."

"Well, au revoir, my dear," Colfax called airily to the girl, and strolled over to Dickson. A fourth was found in Baron Moriarty, and the quartet sat down to *écarté*. It was three in the morning when the Irishman, with a short laugh, arose.

"'Tis enough fur wan avening," he explained. "Ilse O'il have not a sixpence for the ither two of the thrinity."

"Let's to the Maypole," suggested Reggie.

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The Maypole was a resort in Holloway Road frequented by both sexes, and given over to such excesses as predicate themselves upon the wee sma' hours. Thanks to the arrack punch he had imbibed at play, Baxcombe was ready for any and all things, so to the Maypole they went in a couple of hackney-coaches, singing hilariously.

The milch-cows were being driven from the mews on their morning round when the Honorable Donald reached Hanover Square, to be met at the door by his wife. His eyes were worn and puffed, and his gait unsteady.

“Where have you been?” she demanded.

“Demme!” responded her lord and master, “get out of my way!”

## XIV

HAVING assured herself that her husband had left the house, Lady Baxcombe gave way to tears of rage and mortification—mortification because by quarrelling with him she had undone all that had been accomplished, and rage because he had dared to lay hands upon her person.

At the time, however, when the Honorable Donald was hailing a hackney-coach to drive to the Cocoa-Tree her ladyship was drying her tears to nurse the bone of contention. From the first she had been forced into a false position. Her avowal of love had been secured by artifice, without which she would never have given her passion voice. Her only fault lay in yielding to protestations which she could not know were insincere, yet the burden of everything devolved upon her; she was the reckless one, she the interloper. The faults of the others—her dear, credulous father, the conniving baronet, her ungenerous husband—were ignored, while she stood alone in the glare of their folly. It was hard.

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She had meant to use the Prince's friendship to obtain favor for Mr. Baxcombe. Surely it was legitimate for a wife to labor innocently to advance her spouse's interests, and the greatest men of the age lived through their august patrons. A word from the Prince would usurp a cycle of years; why should such an opportunity languish?

By tea-time her ladyship was in a repentant mood. Not that she condoned his action, but was less zealous in condoning her own. As time sped and he came not, she conjured up miserable visions of overturned coaches, dislocated joints, and surgical aid; vowed herself the most cruel of women; enumerated his acts of kindness and morbidly dissected them; thought of the foot-pads between Hyde Park and Kensington, and mercilessly racked her brain to suggest some reason for his being in that vicinity—as is the way of women.

“Does your ladyship desire to wait dinner for Mr. Baxcombe?” inquired a flunky.

She told him she did not desire to wait. It would never do for her husband to come home and find her mooning by the window, while the *entrée* was keeping hot below-stairs. When the man, returning, announced that dinner was served, she choked back the tears and endeavored to eat. Her husband's vacant chair mocked

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her, and the butler, behind her own, oppressed her. Eagerly she listened for the note of the knocker, but it sounded not. On every other occasion she had wondered how such a semblance of wealth—the liveried servants, the rich appointments, and rare old port—was to be supported; but on this occasion no such thought harassed her. For the first time she was eating alone, and that was sufficient, together with her tears, to supply any number of skeletons.

After dinner her maid, Annette, begged the evening out, and the request was granted. Let them all go—the butler, the footman, the second maid, and the cook—what did it matter? If the house was broken into and robbed, and she beaten and insulted, who would care? Snuffing all the dips save one, she crouched in the shadow of the big window in her room, which looked out upon the square. Half an hour later Annette passed into the street with her particular young man, and their merry laughter broke the hush of the thoroughfare like tuneful bells. Then the house settled down to that degree of quiet which ghosts are supposed to love.

Somehow she no longer feared for her husband now that night had fallen; instead, she was apathetic. The little clock on the mantel ticked the eluding minutes, and at every hour the

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cathedral chime tolled. Then silence, save for the rumble of an occasional hackney-coach.

At eleven she partly undressed and slipped into a lounging-robe. The little clock struck one, but still the knocker rested. She fell into a troubled sleep, to awaken at four, benumbed with cold. Thinking that he might have come in, she unfastened the door and listened; the house lay quiet. She slipped down the hall to his room and threw a fresh log on the fire. Half an hour later her straining ears caught the rumble of wheels. It might be only a milk-barrow. Nearer they rolled, and from the night loomed a hackney-coach that drew up to the footway below.

She flew down the stairs, all differences forgotten, intent only on welcoming him. Then came the terrific blow of the knocker, and, when she opened the door, the sight of him, bleary-eyed and hideous. At his brutish exclamation she shrank against the wall, and he passed up the stairs, leaving her to bolt the door.

When the first rays of dawn began to draw the furniture in more kindly lines, her ladyship, who had not retired, was pale and wan but determined. Twice her husband had given way to intemperance, and on this his day of repentance she would strike for freedom. She dreaded the

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outcome if her stroke of strategy failed of success, but she was willing to make the attempt to the last bulwark and bastion. If she fell in her own trenches she would be no worse off, and she might not fall. Mr. Baxcombe believed her capable of writing to Sir Collyn. *Eh bien*, she would foster the belief in the hope that the impendence of a scene would bring her husband to his knees.

When she descended to the breakfast-room he was standing before the fireplace in a terrible state of nervous depression. She returned his greeting, but if he expected reproaches he was disappointed, for she made no reference to the night before.

“Did you—er—did I keep dinner waiting last eve?”

“No,” she replied, calmly. “I dined at the usual hour.”

He coughed.

“I know you think me a beastly fellow, Hattie. Fact is, I met some old cronies of mine, and we spent the evening at Brooks’s. You don’t know how those things prolong themselves, ‘pon honor, you don’t. I tried to get away half a dozen times—”

“You know, Donald, we agreed that your goings and comings should not be subject to my interference, so there is nothing to be said.”

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"What did—er—you do?" he inquired, not pleased to find himself a nonentity.

"I? I read a little and wrote a few letters."

"I intended to stop at your door when I came in, but it was so devilish late I knew you were asleep."

She restrained the retort that leaped to her lips and said nothing; if he did not remember, she would not enlighten him.

"I saw that man Temple yesterday," he added, after a moment, "at the Cocoa-Tree."

"Does he live there?"

"He has chambers at the White Bear in Piccadilly, I understand; but what's that to you, madame?"

His wife smiled saucily.

"Are you still of the same foolish mind, madame?"

"Will you take me to Carlton House?" she archly inquired.

"No."

"The White Bear, in Piccadilly?" she said, shrugging her pretty shoulders.

## XV

AFTER breakfast, Mr. Baxcombe, in bad temper, withdrew to the room called the "study," without which no English house is complete, to smoke his pipe and drink small-beer, for his feverish stomach's sake. Into this room was ushered Captain the Right Honorable Dudley Trevelyan, of the Guards Blue, a mighty fine buck and one to whom the points of the *code duello* were as an open book.

"Have I the honor of addressing Mr. Baxcombe?" he inquired.

"I am he," said the Honorable Donald, glancing at his visitor's card. "Be seated, sir. To what do I owe the pleasure of this meeting?"

"I come, sir, on behalf of my friend Sir Collyn, to whom, as I understand it, you passed—your pardon, Mr. Baxcombe—some—er—rather unflattering insinuations—"

Obedient to the motion of Baxcombe's hand, the officer paused.

"Am I to be the recipient of a challenge from Sir Collyn, captain?"

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“That is my mission, sir.”

“Then you are wasting time, captain.”

“You mean to infer—er—er—that you refuse to fight? Most extraordinary, 'pon my word! Your reasons, Mr. Baxcombe, sir, if you please?”

“Because,” he said, with a slight smile, “I'm not prepared to give myself to heaven, and I'd hate to send a scamp like Temple to hell.”

Captain Trevelyan arose.

“Sir,” he said, pompously, “Sir Collyn is a demn good fellow and my friend. When you insult my friend you insult me. Sir, my card.”

“You see, I have no need for this one,” drawled Baxcombe, the while tearing the card which he held in his fingers to little bits, that fluttered to the floor.

“So,” grunted the captain. “Pray, sir, what's your objection to me?”

“You describe yourself as the baronet's friend,” replied Baxcombe, with imperturbability, but kindling eyes. “I bid you good-day, sir,” and the man to whom the fine points of the code were as an open book quitted Hanover Square, while his host returned to small-beer and the *Chronicle*.

Presently, with a scowl, he laid down the paper. It seemed to him a pretty state of affairs that, after all he had done for her, he was to be put in the light of an evil-doer, while she bestrode

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the hobby-horse of righteousness. His should be the rôle of tolerance. Had he not suffered socially, pecuniarily, and spiritually to rescue her? And how did she repay? Was she grateful, considerate, obedient? Instead, she was domineering, insolent, vulgar even. They had been married but a few weeks. In decency, her abashment at the situation should have outlived so brief a period. To a woman of his own class the idea of attending a first levee as a bride in the company of a prostitute of women would have been impossible. It could only take root in common soil; yet what could he do? He might plead with her, but the idea disgusted him. It would be the first time that a Lady Baxcombe was ever exhorted to propriety of demeanor.

It must be owned that Mr. Baxcombe's view of matrimony had its shortcomings. He contended that the mission of a wife consisted in pleasing the eye, tickling the palate, revering her lord, and managing the house, after which she should obliterate herself. In a word, he was willing to enjoy the pleasures of married life, but unwilling to put up with the exactions, whereas marital felicity is born of compromise. Mr. Baxcombe's emotion for his wife was a momentary conquest of romance over a temperament romantically inclined; hers for him was nothing less than a great love.

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Yet she was resolved to pretend to the last moment, even to the donning of her gown, that Sir Collyn was to accompany her. Would her husband surrender or fight? He gave no inkling.

The next day was that of the levee. Mr. Baxcombe realized it with a sardonic smile, and was so pleasant to his man Axel that that worthy was startled into nervousness as he adjusted his master's muslin neckerchief.

"Lay out my small-clothes," said the Honorable Donald. "Possibly I'll go to the levee. But mind, not a word to any one, confound you!"

"Very good, sir," responded Axel, but with widening eyes, for the quarrel was a morsel below stairs, and his master lost cast in Axel's eyes for so yielding to a woman's whim; but Baxcombe, who had read the last issue of the *Chronicle*, was wiser than his man, who had not.

"Tell them to put the horses to, but to keep the coach in the house until I call."

"Very good, sir. Shall I use the Violette de la Reine, sir, or the Heliotrope Blanc?"

"Are—are you going out?" her ladyship asked, as Baxcombe descended the stairs.

"No, madame," he replied. "I thought something of staying home and keeping house for you."

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A lump leaped to her throat, for this did not look much like surrender.

Some hours later, as Axel was dozing below stairs, the bells jangled and sent him at top speed to his master's room.

“Dress me,” commanded Mr. Baxcombe, “for the levee.”

Annette was then putting the finishing touches to my lady's *grande toilette*. The robe was of white crêpe, over white satin, with a border of water-lilies in gold; the bodice of white satin with point-lace ornaments and edgings of narrow gold trimming. Over the whole of the enormous court-hoop was spread an elaborate embroidery in tissue of gold. Her chestnut hair was done in irregular curls on the crown of the head and flowed in ringlets on the left side, so as to play on the pink-and-white shoulder. In the front of the forehead the coil was parted and emblazoned with a diamond star, a gift from Mr. Baxcombe.

“Have—have you seen my husband?” chattered the girl, whose courage was ebbing now that the crisis was at hand.

“Doubtless monsieur ees engaged.”

“Is he in the house?”

“I know it not, madame.”

Oh, why had she been so foolish? Why? why? She clasped her hands in a fury of impotence. What could she do? Pretend further

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and chance it that her husband would weaken at the eleventh hour? But suppose he did not, and she had to creep up-stairs, crestfallen, while the servants gossiped and grinned?

“Madame ees not well?” queried Annette. “Une peu sal volatile, madame?”

“No,” madame replied, trembling. “I am very well, but I don’t believe I’ll go, Annette.”

“Not go, madame! Ma foi, zat would be ze peety, and such une grande toilette. Eet ees a leetle nervous zat madame feels, but zat ees noozing. While I was een ze sairveece of Madame la Comtesse de Journafouchard—” but she stopped abruptly, supporting her mistress with one hand, while, with the other, she jerked the bell-rope.

“Tell monsieur to come,” she said to James, who responded. “Madame ees fainted, but first carry madame to ze divan.”

But at that moment her ladyship opened her eyes.

“Madame ees bettaire now?”

“Yes—yes, I was only a bit dizzy,” she replied, weakly. “My—my fan, Annette.”

When she essayed to stand, her legs would not support her.

“Shall I fetch your ladyship a glass of water?” inquired James.

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"I—I think I had better lie down, Annette—I—"

"Madame!" the maid ejaculated. "Oh! le bon Dieu! In zat robe, in zat coiffeur!"

"Oh!" murmured the mistress, with a sense of guilt. "I had forgotten."

At the curacy she had been accustomed to lie down when she pleased. Little harm could befall her serviceable cloth dresses.

Her covert glance at her husband when he entered brought an added pang, for he was certainly monstrous handsome. His hair was lightly powdered, and the long, full cape-coat, which fell to his heels, concealed his small-clothes, even to the court sword, that dangled from his hip. When the servants were gone he seated himself by the window, seemingly oblivious to her presence.

"Why are you here, Donald?" she said, in a voice that shook. "Do you think to prevent me from leaving the house?"

"Madame," he returned, "you are free to leave whenever it pleases you. I am here merely to see with whom you go."

"Do you think it manly to spy on me?"

"It is necessary, madame."

"Why?" she asked, archly. "You know with whom I am to go."

Glancing at his watch, he observed:

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“The baronet is late.”

“Mayhap he has far to come,” she suggested; and he came near spoiling all by smiling.

“I dare say,” he said, instead.

Her ladyship had not read the *Chronicle*.

“You told me that if I went to the levee I should have to answer to you. Well, I’m going, you see,” she said, with wildly beating heart.

“What are you going to do, Donald? Won’t you answer me?”

Evidently he would not. She arose and went to the other window. It was so silly she could almost laugh, yet so serious she wanted to cry.

“This is our second masque, madame,” he said, coldly. “How many are yet to come?”

She turned scarlet, but the mantel intervened, and he could not see. As the flush was fading, she knew that he was behind her, but she continued to gaze, expectantly, over Hanover Square.

“You told me you had written to Sir Collyn, and you now expect, or pretend to expect, him. What would his coming avail you, madame, since I should have him booted down my stairs?”

Her eyes brightened.

“You observe that I speak in the potential, madame, so pray make use of that mood.”

Her heart fluttered like a caged bird.

“I am addressing you, madame.”

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"I—I have nothing to say," she responded, with drooping head.

"The baronet is very late," he mused; "but there is some excuse. It is quite a distance from Calais to London."

"Calais!" she exclaimed, with bated breath.

"He left town when I refused his challenge. It was in the papers. He was driven out by honest sentiment. Men know him well."

Challenge! Her heart stumbled in its work. Challenge! What damage her folly might have wrought!

Her face was still turned from him, but he understood from watching her shoulders, and quietly unbuttoned his long coat. It fell away and revealed his court suit of black satin and the cut-steel hilt of his court sword.

"I don't suppose," he said, meekly, "that you will accept me as a substitute?"

Wonderingly she faced him, and with tear-strewn lashes. Reassured by his kindly smile, she stretched forth her hands.

"Forgive me!" she said, simply. "I never wrote the man."

## XVI

AS their coach sped across the square she slipped her fingers under his arm and said: "You are good to me."

"No," he retorted. "I am nothing of the kind."

"But I know you are," she said, turning towards him with a pretty gesture of deprecation. "I—I acted very wrongly. Please forgive me."

"I am the one to seek forgiveness."

"Don't let's say anything more about that," she suggested, looking out of the window.

"I seek pleasure when the happiness is at my own fireside, with you. I"—but her fingers closed his mouth.

"Hush!" she said. "We need not say such things when we *feel* them. Don't say them."

"Why are you so forgiving?" he asked, catching his breath.

"I—I am not," she murmured.

"Why?" he demanded, but she kept her face turned from him. "Why?"

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"No matter," he sighed. "I am through with it. I've been a brute, but I'll turn the leaf. I am through."

"Oh, I'm so glad!"

The vibratory tone struck to his heart.

"It has been hard for you, little girl," he said.

"It does not matter. Nothing matters, Donald, if you will only keep to that," she cried—"if you only will."

His eyes grew moist.

"You love me," he said. "Egad! You love me."

"Yes," she returned, with a woman's strange pride. "I love you."

She could not have told herself why; she only knew that she loved this man, and that was all-sufficient unto her. By his show of feeling he had persuaded her to believe herself the more delinquent. In that moment his outrages fled from view, and her offences writhed in the light. When he announced his intention to reform, her heart had leaped out to him and she was proud of him and happy in the love that could aid him. She would have been less happy had she known the substance of his joy. No sooner did he realize that the prize was his than he half wished it away, that it might again be battled for, but, drawing her to him, he kissed the red lips.

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Soon they were approaching Carlton House.

"It seems we are hemmed in," said he, after looking out of the window. "Demme!"

"I am very frightened," she said, shivering.

Thoroughbred horses pirouetted, doors slammed, and the crowd yelled from delight. Their vehicle was sandwiched between that of his grace of Roxby and a coach containing two dancers from the opera. A few minutes later the Baxcombe coach lunged forward. The gain was small, but afforded a view of the entrance-way, through the row of pillars separating the fore court from Pall Mall.

"What are they for — the columns? They block the way and don't hold anything up!" she exclaimed.

*"Care Colonne qui state qua  
Non Sapiamo in verita—"*

he quoted, and laughingly translated:

*"Dear little pillars, all in a row,  
What do you do there?  
Indeed we don't know."*

"The man just stepping from the second coach is Rear-Admiral Payne, 'Jack Payne,' a decent sort enough. The gentleman to his left is Sheridan; what a calf's head for a genius. By-the-way, I spoke with Devonshire t'other

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night, and he told me that the Duchess intended calling on you."

"Me?" her ladyship ejaculated.

"My dear," said her husband, "Georgiana is a lovely woman, and a brilliant one—too brilliant to waste herself on the Whigs when she should be Tory—but her family is not one demn bit better than mine. You may meet her to-day. If you do, bear what I have said in mind."

Her ladyship's eyes flashed.

"You are certain to meet Lady Jersey, and —er—as she is a charge upon the state, you need neither adopt her nor be adopted. The same applies to Lady Cholmondeley."

"I half wish I hadn't come," she sighed.

"You will see so much in the Prince that is charming that you will be tempted into believing nothing bad of him. However, you have only to look about you. Parasites, sycophants, kept mistresses, and the rest will rub elbows with you."

"It seems you are taking me into very bad company."

"I am. You would come."

"I wanted to come only because I thought the association would benefit you," she said, "because I feel sure enough of myself to meet any man. I am very sorry you are not so sure of me. Please don't interrupt. I want to say

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this, Donald: Our — our marriage wasn't like most marriages, you know; most young people have only to accomplish their happiness. We have many other things to do. I'm only the junior clerk in the partnership, but I intend to do my very best, even—even if I risk my discharge by acting sometimes as I think right." She moistened her lips. "You tell me you love me, my husband. I want you to love me"—her fingers closed over his—"I want your love to nurse my love, but, far above that, I want it to be our silent partner. It will help me to help you to a grand career. But you don't really love me now. No, for when you do you will trust me, Donald."

The coach rolled forward, and there was no time for more.

"We are here," her husband said, unfastening his coat.

From the open doorways of the palace swept a searching odor of perfume, and the girl saw a kaleidoscope of brilliant hues and firelit jewels. Passing through the octagonal room, her husband led the way to the grand staircase, of elliptical form, the railings of which glittered with ornaments of gilt and bronze. Guiding her ladyship through the crush of bare shoulders, satin coats, and plush liveries, he made his way to an antechamber, and then into the rose-

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satin drawing-room, where the levees were then held.

The formal reception had concluded, and the Prince was talking with Burke and Sheridan. As soon as Baxcombe and his lady entered his royal Highness came forward and graciously greeted them. Checking Lady Baxcombe's courtesy, the Prince remarked:

“Nay, madame. Homage from one so fair is but a mockery. Let me welcome you and your enviable husband as my friends, a relation which shall ever be precious to me.”

Her head swam, her cheeks and ears tingled, and for the life of her she could not command her tongue. Then the respectful lull in conversation gave place to the hum of many voices, as the Prince, turning to Baxcombe, said:

“You, sir, are doubly welcome. I may say that the arts have found in me no mean patron, and I am always glad to have by me men of genius, particularly when that quality is supported by a record of fealty towards my house. Command my best services, sir, at any time. And now, if Lady Baxcombe chooses, I shall be pleased to make her better acquainted with the company.”

As his royal Highness extended his arm to her ladyship, Baxcombe, bowing low, stepped aside. The eyes of all were upon the pair, and as he

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realized what was uppermost in every mind save hers the thought grew maddening; yet calm reasoning told him that in neither light could this meeting do harm. If her purpose was high-souled and innocent, no bad could result; if it was vicious, there would be opportunities in plenty.

“Are felicitations in order, sir?” inquired a gentleman at his elbow.

“Usually when a man marries, Brummell.”

“When a man marries,” murmured the beau. “What a refrain that would make! I’ll have to give it over to Moore. Let me see. When a man marries he gets a divorce—ahem! When a man marries he gets a divorce, dev’lish near as a matter of course. Demme, I’m not bad, ‘pon my soul!”

“Is that meant to apply?”

“On no account, my dear fellow. A—a case of honi soit. A rhymester, you know, takes license.”

“Prithee, good sir,” exclaimed a lovely woman to Baxcombe, “is it as bad as this—a few minutes of separation and the sky clouds?”

“The sky could not remain overcast with your grace to brighten it,” he returned, smiling.

“Fair words make pretty speeches,” laughed the lady.

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"None but pretty speeches reach Georgiana's ears."

"A pity you are not an office-seeker," said her grace of Devonshire. "If you were I could help you. Flattery is the key to my heart. For an Irishman who asked me to light his pipe from the fire of my eyes I got a billet worth three thousand the year. He was worth it, to my thinking. The Duke says, 'Fore Gad, you look well to-night! Hang it, Georgiana, you do!'"

Mr. Baxcombe laughed.

"Please take me to your lady, Donald. The Jersey is snatching the Prince away, and I really want to meet Lady Baxcombe."

Gladly assenting, he presented the Duchess, who chatted pleasantly until the suggestion was made that the rush could be avoided by leaving early.

"Advice worth taking, my dear," said her grace. "Where is that big booby of mine? He must meet you."

The Duke was not to be found, and the Duchess left them to pay their devoirs to his Royal Highness and withdraw.

The Prince, graciously smiling, extended his hand to be kissed, but the girl either did not comprehend, or something in her husband's manner impelled her to merely courtesy deeply. A

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flush crossed his Highness's face; then he smiled again and said:

“We hope to see much of Lady Baxcombe.”

“What is the bad news?” the Honorable Donald inquired of her once they were within their coach.

“Bad news? Oh, Donald, it's good news, glorious news!”

“Well?”

“The Prince offers to give you a commission to paint Lady Jersey's portrait.”

Her husband said nothing, and his indifference made her falter.

“It—it means so much to us, Donald. It will bring you fame. Your father's hopes and mine will be realized. Ah, Donald, I wish you seemed to appreciate. The Prince is deeply interested in you—”

“He takes not the least interest in me—in you, mayhap.”

“But what difference does that make to us, Donald? It works out to the same. I admit it only for argument. You are wrong, for he is interested in you. Think how other men have toiled year after year with no recompense, no such opportunity. It would be the making of you. You—you have been a bad boy, dear, and now comes the chance of recouping it all—and more. You will do it. I know you will—for my sake.”

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Her eyes glistened, her bosom heaved, as she spoke.

“Your life has been too easy, Donald. You have reaped without cost.”

“I shall not reap at such a cost as this. You don’t know what you are saying.”

“You can’t mean that you will not accept it?”

“I mean,” he said, with glowing eyes, “that I would not barter your good name to be the author of *Le Retour de Chasse*. I mean that I’ll not take his bribe nor connive with him to attack my wife’s virtue. He cares nothing for me. He is a poltroon!”

“You persist in assigning bad motives to him. If every one is of similar bias, no wonder he is slandered.”

Then she had recourse to tears. She had tried to help her husband, tried to make him happy, tried so hard to make him forget his reason for marrying her. In vain he protested that she had accomplished all that and more; she refused to be consoled. In vain he tried to comfort her; she would not be comforted.

## XVII

NEVERTHELESS, the studio took on the guise of a worker's apartment. Chalk, pigments, and brushes were strewn on the floor, together with gray, yellow, and white papers, stretched canvases, and smeared rags.

He had insisted on painting his wife in her presentation robe, and a half-finished canvas stood in the centre of the room, the legs of the easel being obscured by countless sketches. No one could see his work without being impressed with the genius dormant in the man. Faults there were, in plenty, but the virtues of a *maestro* were there as well. His sense of color and color-values was superb. His colors were almost his own—velvet reds shaded to palest pinks, blues that spoke of the heavens, yellows silvered down to sun-rays, and a white as intangible as a fleecy cloud. Once, when two gentlemen were viewing a university exhibit, his great fault was aptly touched upon.

“That fellow,” declared the elder, pointing to a canvas labelled “Brook in Shropshire—D. B.,”

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“should go to Paris. If he has not the money, some lover of art should supply it. That picture has all the ear-marks of genius.”

“I agree that he should go to Paris,” said the other, “but with no more than ten francs in his pocket. An empty stomach—”

“Would lead him to tavern-signs in order that the stomach might be full.”

“—would make him an artist. See! He started with that clump of trees; note how painstakingly they are handled! The sunlight through the branches is fine work, is it not? The reflection in the water is almost genius. Now turn your attention to the oaks on the left; they are slurred, the shadows are massed to save detail—the detail of which he was proud at first. The whole thing is unbalanced, because he was lazy. It should be cut in two, the oaks consigned to the ash-barrow, and the rest labelled, ‘Clump of Trees in Sunlight.’”

The picture had been painted as its critic had surmised. The Honorable Donald was outrageously lazy. He worked at times with super-human energy, but not for long—not long enough to complete anything satisfactorily. Although the features in the portrait of his wife were blocked in only, one-third of the dress was completed.

“I am jealous,” she said, prettily. “You paint

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the satin of my gown but not the satin of my cheeks."

"The one is easier copied than the other, my dear," he said; and so it was, since he was a master of sheen and loved to paint it. But he soon tired of his brushes, and, when his wife's reproaches annoyed him, again frequented the coffee-houses, where men eyed him askance. He knew not why, because unaware of the visits of George, Prince of Wales, to Hanover Square. It was well for Lady Baxcombe that her husband was ignorant of the royal visits, for princes may not be ordered right about, no matter how much one may wish to do so. Gossip had it from Lady Kitty Holborn, who, to her delight, noticed the royal coach before the Baxcombe link extinguishers. Half an hour after Lady Kitty was telling the story over the chocolate-cups, and by the next day the reign of a new favorite was proclaimed to the city.

The Prince came not once, but half a score times, to the terror of the girl, who feared that her husband would find him there and accuse her wrongfully. Surely she was not to blame. She had hinted more broadly than she should, wished with all her heart that she had not gone to the levee, wished herself as ugly as a Fury, so that she might escape his Highness's attentions.

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There came a day—it was bound to come—when the ardor of the Prince overstepped his discretion. His crime was not of the deepest dye, for it involved only a stolen embrace, but his purpose was bared. After he had gone the girl, weak and trembling, sought her room, where she wept until sundown, and arose determined. She would explain to the Prince how embarrassing the situation was becoming, ignoring even the contemplation of evil, and rely upon his manhood. Failing that, she would refuse to receive him, come of it what might. In that event, though, the commission to Donald would fall through, and she had treasured the possibility of his accepting it. He had such ability, such genius, it was a pity. Taking a tallow-dip, she stole into the studio and examined the unfinished portrait of herself. Under the candle-light the painted satin flashed and glowed with the warmth of life.

“The mirror does you better justice,” said her husband, who had entered behind her. “Why do you not study it?”

“Because to gain this effect I would be constantly changing my robe.”

“Do you know,” he said, “the lips of young misses were made but for kisses?”

“And,” she returned, quickly, “the brains of a man should work all they can.”

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“I’ll illustrate my epigram,” he laughed, “and yours will keep for Devonshire House, where I’ll take you, little wit, to-night.”

Devonshire House, the residence in Piccadilly of the Devonshire family, had, for over a hundred years, shared with Holland House the distinction of being the headquarters of the Whig party, to which the Prince of Wales was affianced. The Duchess Georgiana, likened to the De Longueville, ruled there with scintillant grace, while the indolent, honest Duke was content to bask in her refulgence. Where the wits of Grey, Sheridan, Whitbred, Lord Robert Spencer, Fox, Hare, Fitzpatrick, and Selwyn met *en rapport*, mediocrity in Lady Baxcombe could have been condoned; but her natural aptitude carried her through the ordeal.

“I understood that the Prince was to be with us to-night,” said the great dramatist to her grace.

“He was at the Cocoa-Tree this afternoon,” chimed in Sir Sydney Lacking.

“He told me he was coming,” said the Duchess, “but Lady Moira’s rout and the Countess’s whist are both down for this evening. I vow, you are all like boys at the play: you never know your quantum sufficit.”

“His Highness was speaking with me yesterday,” declared Mr. Burke, “anent his desire to

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have a battalion in case the French effect a landing."

"Promise him it, 'fore Gad!" cried Fox. "Promise him the commander-in-chiefship. Lud! you'll never have to make good."

"He should have it," Georgiana said, spiritedly. "The idea of forcing a Prince of Wales to be content with a mere cavalry regiment. His Majesty is in his dotage, or he never would advance such an opinion. The place for our future king in times of national danger is at the head of our troops, sword in hand—"

"Nay! nay!" reproved Sheridan, his eyes twinkling. "His place, if needs be, is under a barrel—"

"A full barrel," slyly suggested Selwyn.

"—a barrel, so that he may remain our future king."

"I hear wheels," a gentleman remarked. "It may be that the Prince has come."

Confused voices arose from the stairway, and George Selwyn solemnly winked at Burke, who sat opposite. Then a lackey announced: "His Royal Highness Prince George!"

But the figure of the man so indicated bore no likeness to the handsome, graceful George of that morning. His face was pallid and splotched; the usually arrogant eyes were stupid and blood-shot, and he was too apparently leaning for support upon the arm of his aide.

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“My lords and ladies!” he said, thickly.

“Your Royal Highness!” ejaculated Spencer, taking a step forward as the Prince reeled. Great beads of perspiration sprang to the royal brow and the lower lip fell.

“I am taken bad,” the Prince mouthed to his aide, Colonel Lake. “A s’dan, Lake—a s’dan! I’ll go home in a s’dan.” And, the chair being fetched, his drunken Highness fell into it, and was carted to Carlton House.

During the little drama Lady Baxcombe had sat as one petrified, for to her innocence a prince was by birth allied to the gods. The sight of him lowered to bestiality shocked and revolted her.

“I am glad this happened,” her husband said as he assisted her to enter the coach. “It is a nightly occurrence, but seldom is it so plainly revealed to society.”

“I, too, am glad,” she said, simply.

At the crossing of Piccadilly with Albemarle Street the coach came to such a sudden halt that her ladyship was pitched against the front glass.

“Prince and coachman!” muttered her husband, who had been about to take a pinch of maccoboy. The snuff-box was so rudely shaken that half the contents lay in his lap, when his wife, giving vent to a stifled scream, sat bolt

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upright, looking into the barrel of a loaded pistol in the grasp of a footpad.

“Sorry ter be troublin’ the loikes of yer ‘onor,” the man was saying, “but hi’ll tyke the jule the lydy be wearin’ hin ‘er ‘air, hand then awskin’ yer ‘onor fer yer spare chinge hand the box.”

“No!” Baxcombe said, quickly, as his wife reached for the ornament.

“Hi sye ‘yis,” the highwayman commanded, “hor this ‘ere wepon, ‘avin’ ha slippery trigger—” but the contents of the snuff-box, deftly tossed into the fellow’s eyes, as the Honorable Donald cried to the coachman to drive on, effected their escape.

“Those rascals get bolder,” he remarked, as they turned into Hanover Square. “I’d not have lost my box for a century. Lynn gave it to me two years back.”

“The constables are never about,” she said, trembling.

Her husband indicated the watch-house at the corner of the square.

“It is warmer in there,” he said, “for their old bones.”

## XVIII

THE next day Mr. Baxcombe dropped in the Prince of Wales coffee-house for a brandy-and-water. The place was crowded with bloods, dicing, drinking, and scanning the newspapers. In a corner, by a window overlooking the street, sat Lynn, reading the *Post*. At sight of Baxcombe he discarded the paper, picked it up again, summoned a waiter, and bade him take it to Colonel St. Leger, who was sipping toddy a few paces away. The article Lynn had been reading ran:

"A certain estimable gentleman, who resides not more than twenty miles from Hanover Square, would do well not to become too elated over his prospects. We could say more, but 'a word to the wise,' etc.

"'Knows he the world so little, and its trade.'"

"Well, we meet, and so is it meet that we drink together," said Sir Rodney.

When the cognac was poured, the baronet held his glass to the light.

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"I understand there is a possibility of your securing a commission from the Prince, Donald?"

"How did you hear of it? Is it going the round of the coffee-houses already?"

"No," Lynn replied, after glancing sharply at his companion, "not that I know of. It seems to me—fact is, Don, I forget how I got it. From McMahon, I think."

"Anything from McMahon's lips is slander."

"Oh, well, not so bad as that. As you get older you will recognize how necessary it is to look for the virtues in your fellow-men. Any-way, I am glad you are not going to take it."

"How could I take it?"

The baronet smoothed his chin.

"And if I could, and did, I'd never get a sixpence."

"Egad! that's true enough, in all conscience," laughed Sir Rodney.

Then he grew grave again. He would have liked to drop a hint, but the informer's is a thankless part, so the baronet, man of the world, unwisely kept his tongue. Meanwhile, two young bloods had taken seats at an adjoining table.

"Seen the *Post*?" said one.

"Demn the *Post*!" retorted the other. "Waiter, two halves of Ruinart."

"Listen here! Egad! 'Miss Maude Montres-

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sor, of the Royal Garden, has received an offer to appear in the States.' That's my little Maudie, ye know!"

"Is that so, old chap—really?" drawled the dandy in plum.

"Come, Don," said the baronet, who saw that in the course of their meandering they must touch upon the item dealing with Hanover Square.

"No, no," protested Baxcombe; "let us hear it out."

"And d' ye see this?" said the coxcomb. "Smash my topper, if old Lord Denton—that's Ld. D., ye know—isn't going to marry Jennie Livingston! Sweet little Jennie! D' ye mind the day at Ranelagh when the little fairy gave me her slipper to kiss? Egad! They can't resist me, the ladies! And listen here—"

Sir Rodney moved his chair between the lads and Baxcombe. "Come, Don," he said, plaintively.

"A certain estimable gentleman, who resides not more than twenty miles from Hanover Square, would do well not to become too elated over his prospects. We could say more, but "a word to the wise," etc.' Ha! ha! And who's that, Bruce? Tell me who's meant, you dog!"

Baxcombe sat pale and composed. The one

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called Bruce could not imagine, and the other dandy was disconcerted by the utter quiet.

"Why," he said, glancing defiantly about, "it's as plain as can be. It means Donald Baxcombe's lady and the Prince."

A chair fell backward with a crash, Sir Rodney was hurled out of the way, and Baxcombe, seizing the lad by the throat, shook him as one would a puppy.

"Tell these gentlemen you lie!"

"Here!" interposed the baronet. "Quit it, Don! He's but a boy."

"He is old enough to know better," said some one. The place was in a turmoil.

"If you think I lie," cried the lad, hysterically, "go and see. He's there now. Go and see, go and see if I lie, damn you! And you shall answer for this. I'll shoot you, I will."

For a moment Baxcombe stood pale and quivering, then without a word he left the room.

"Where are you going, Don?" inquired the baronet, in the passageway.

"Home," he said, hoarsely.

"One moment; it's treason."

Baxcombe laughed.

"It's treason," said Lynn; "but meet me at Whitehall Stairs. I am off, now, for the wharves."

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The two clasped hands and then separated, each to his duty.

While the Honorable Donald was on his way to the coffee-house, his Royal Highness was leaving Carlton Palace for Hanover Square. He rode with outriders, determined to create an impression.

"It will be the first time I have failed," he said, tapping his snuff-box. "I forgot that these country ladies o'erestimate themselves, and so I was too eager. Half an hour after I enter the house my livery will have carried the news through ten miles of London streets and back to my lady's doorstep. When she comes face to face with the thing it 'll not seem such a spectre. The postilion employs the same principle with a shying horse; once acquainted with the shadow, the horse no longer shies. My best course from now is the interesting melancholy, a sort of Hamlet, as it were. It would not do with a city woman, but this one isn't city bred. But it's always such a grind," he yawned—"such a demned, beastly grind."

Lady Baxcombe, who had been informed of the royal visit, was in a state of nervous excitement. As she descended the stairs she smothered her palms with powder for the fiftieth time. This was to be the crisis. She

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entered, and, as the catch of the door slipped back, the Prince, who had been gazing out of the window, came forward.

"Ah, madame," he said, fervently, "I come as a suppliant for pardon, and with but one excuse upon my lips, an excuse which I dare to hope will make you look pityingly upon me."

"I would rather forget than excuse," she said, simply. "Let us forget."

"You bid me forget the sweetest moment of my life, a life that has numbered so few moments worth cherishing. You are cruel, madame. I yielded to an impulse inspired by a beauty as matchless as it is maddening. That is my excuse. Forget I cannot, nor would I were it possible."

"Then tell me you regret."

"No," said the Prince, sighing, "nor do I regret. A multitude of lies are told about, but none by, me. They have it that my life is vicious and depraved. They accredit bad motives to my every action; they little know my heart."

He escorted her to the Sheraton divan.

"It is easily seen," he mournfully went on, "that the poisoners have reached you. Good Heavens! Is there a mind in all the kingdom that has escaped their venom? I thought 'twas to be my privilege to find in you a fond, warm

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friend. It has been a relief to be with you—you, so artless, so lovely, upon whom I counted for justice, at least. Madame, you see before you the victim of court jealousy, rapacity, and slander; not the man beast my enemies would make me out, by misrepresenting my every deed and by seizing upon even the manifestations of the malady from which I suffer and which often afflicts me at inconvenient moments—”

The memory of the evening at Devonshire House flashed upon her, and she guiltily avoided his eyes.

“—to distort into evidence of vicious habits. Do not, I beg of you—your friendship means too much to me—yield to malice before you know the truth.”

“I have longed to disbelieve,” she said, quickly, and then trembled lest her words be misinterpreted. A gleam lay in his eyes.

“What a happy thing it would be,” he continued, “if people could be taught that princes are not idols, but men, with the usual shortcomings! Not one-twentieth of the report anent me is true, and I wager the same holds good with the tales of the Pretenders. We are all pretenders, more or less. We must pretend to live; it is the theory of society. We must pretend to be blind when we see, to happiness

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in despair, to content when longing racks us—pretend all our days; but a prince must do a hundred's share. He knows the bitterness of it."

In conversation the man's face lighted wonderfully, and he possessed the actor's faculty of effective modulation, so that what passed for feeling was really but a trick of vocalization.

"You sought to induce pretence but a few moments back."

"I, your Highness?"

"You wished me to pretend sorrow for having taken the kiss."

"I wished you to be sorry."

"Why should I be, my dear lady? I am old enough to be your father; indeed, you might consider me in that light. I am a married man, with a little daughter."

"Twice married," she could not help saying, and he became austere.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, I—"

"I will set the example," he said, gently. "Will you not profit by it?"

Flushed and confused, she knew not what to say.

"Mayhap that is why you are inclined against me. Is that why?"

"I—I am not," she said, with fugitive eyes. "I do not know you."

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“But you have heard false reports and put trust in them?”

“I—I have heard some things.”

“I am not in the habit of discussing my affairs,” he said, after a moment, “but since this is an occasion where the truth may do good, you may have it, madame. Shortly after my marriage to Mrs. Fitzherbert my mother sent for me. You understand that the alliance was looked upon as a political faux-pas. The Queen insisted upon knowing if the news was correct. I assured her it was, and, after acquainting her with the sweet disposition of my wife, I announced that no power on earth could separate us, and proportionately as my wife was received at court my devoirs would be paid to her Majesty. That was in 1786. Until 1794 we lived in the utmost felicity. In that year affairs of state entered by the door and happiness escaped by the window. The King’s ill-health, coupled with our disasters over-seas and one or two other matters, made it imperative that an alliance be contracted with some sovereign state. The only way in which such an alliance could be effected was by a marriage on my part with some lady of equal rank. You know upon whom the selection fell, and you, madame, in the goodness of your heart, can appreciate my anguish at thought of separating from my beloved wife. Night after night I spent

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in feverish unrest; time after time I was desperately tempted to let the nation care for itself, while I cared for my love; but—I conquered."

The Prince artistically allowed his voice to falter.

"But the end is not yet. My heart bled for the woman whose happiness was to be wrecked with mine. I dreaded the effect the news would have upon her. I feared for her reason—nay, for her life. I delayed telling her, because I could not nerve myself to inflict pain upon her whose presence had afforded me naught but joy. Ah, madame, how mistaken I was! The woman the gratification of whose every whim had been my life's work, whose kisses had polluted my lips, shed not a tear, expressed no regrets, cherished no fond memories. With new-coined guineas they bought the past."

Tears glistened upon her lashes—tears of warm-hearted sympathy.

"And what is the reward? They say that the marriage which wrecked my life was brought about to line my purse. They say that, since it was impossible to ask Parliament for money, because of the immense loans to be raised to meet current expenses, I was married into the Brunswick family, with my consent, in order that the Lords and Commons might grant to my family what was denied to me. My every deed is

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vilified, my whole character so vilely impeached, that even you, sweet and clean as you are, have been impressed by the slander. That is reward, madame. Good God! Is there nowhere I may turn? Is there no person with justice enough to refrain from condemning me unheard? Is there no sympathy alive?"

"Yes," said the girl, softly, "there is."

"You say it, but—"

"I mean it; and as I sympathize, so will others when the truth is before them. True worth claims its own reward in the end."

"In the end," the Prince said, bitterly; "when I am gone. In the meanwhile, while I live, I find myself assailed upon all points, from matters of state to the consoling kiss. The etiquette which says that you may kiss my hand in purity while I cannot touch your lips save in vice is rotten, madame. We both kiss in token of fealty—you to rank and I to beauty; you to your future king and I to my future subject."

"My kisses know no king save one," she gently responded, "who is my husband."

George walked to the window, and for several moments neither spoke. At last, having summoned courage, she said:

"We must not think unpleasant things, your Highness, since this is likely to be the last time I

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shall have the honor of receiving your Highness in private."

"Indeed!" he said, archly. "It is customary to consult my inclination."

"But your Highness will not allow your inclination to work injustice to others, I am sure. I do not know precisely how to explain myself," she said, helplessly, "but—"

"Allow me: but my husband is a man of temper and the Prince is a seducer of women."

His scathing irony withered her past conception of insult.

"Therefore," he continued, "if my husband should find him here, the situation would be awkward for me."

"And for you?" she hazarded, with a little smile.

"I am the Prince," he said.

"And I am but a woman," she flung in his face, "opposed to 'the first gentleman of Europe.' Your Highness surmises correctly, and I have no higher favor to ask of you than that you will leave me free from aspersion. Only yesterday I was taunted with a relation which I long to believe would be as hideously impossible for your Highness as it is for me. A woman who claims friendship for me saw your coach before my door. It was enough, and she congratulated me upon a conquest. I tell your Highness this only

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to prove that my fears are not groundless, and, having proven that, I know you will put an end to these visits. I will not believe that you can persist."

The Prince, bowing gracefully, moved towards the door.

"This is the first time, madame," he said, pausing before Lady Baxcombe, "that this strange honor has been thrust upon me. If you were a man—I am a fair swordsman and a good shot—I might waive my rank for sake of the opportunity."

She swallowed hard.

"You are not a man, so I must choose my means and bide my time," and before she could move he had seized her.

"I regret, madame, that you make me the executioner of your pride, but so be it."

She gave no sign, made no effort to escape, but with closed eyes and white, wan face awaited him. She felt his arms tighten; the cold star on his breast pressed into her bosom; his lips fastened upon hers and held there. Then, as she was about to swoon, she was suddenly released. At the same moment the Prince cursed; there was a scuffle and a heavy fall.

"You hound!" snarled her husband's well-known voice.

From the corner into which he had been flung

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the Prince arose, livid. In his hand glistened the pocket-pistol which he always carried, and with reason.

“Stand aside, sir!” he said, determinedly, to the half-crazed man who stood, with folded arms, barring the way.

“Oh, God!” cried the girl.

“Stand aside, sir!” said the Prince again.

Baxcombe, with panther eyes, was measuring the distance between them. A shot rang out. The stench of powder filled the room, and through the smoke the girl saw that her husband had George by the throat and was slowly throttling him; then she swooned.

The Prince was a man of strength and battled for his life. Around the room they squirmed, upsetting the chocolate-table. The china broke to fragments. By great effort the Prince slipped from the tenacious fingers, but Baxcombe, catching him under the shoulders, flung him across the room again. With a sickening thud the Prince’s head struck the door-jam, and a rivulet of blood coursed down the Turkey carpet.

Without a glance at his wife or a word to the terrified James, whom he met in the hall, Baxcombe passed into the outer air. The possilions glanced up inquiringly, but without suspicion, as he descended the stairs. Suddenly the idea occurred to him that if the coach could

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be lured away pursuit would be retarded. Without so much as a flickering lash, he stepped to the coach door and opened it.

“On royal service,” he said. “The Bell, in Holborn.”

## XIX

AS the coach sped down the streets shopmen were putting up their shutters for the night; the beaux were wending their way to Pall Mall, ogling women of the street as they went; loiterers were congregating on the corners; the city of night was a different city from that of day.

The glances shot at the royal vehicle were not of the pleasant kind. Plenty there were in London who knew George of Wales to their sorrow, and these cursed; others there were in whom love for the show of kinglets was strong, and these doffed their hats.

The coach turned into George Street, a swirl of mud splashing the on-lookers; then to the left, and a clear trip to High Holborn and the Bell Tavern, whence started the coaches for Cheltenham, Abingdon, Woodstock, and Blenheim.

The arrival of so fine a chariot brought half the inn to the balconies.

“A royal messenger,” whispered one, as Baxcombe alighted.

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“Mayhap a diplomatic mission,” suggested another.

“More likely one of George’s agents,” sneered a buck, at which the loungers sniggered.

“Book me for an inside place on *The Princess Caroline* as far as Maidenhead,” the supposed courier was saying. “Name, Reginald Trenly, O.R.S.”

Strolling into the ordinary, he drank a brandy-and-water, and then sauntered into the street. Once past the corner he hailed a hackney-coach.

“Whitehall! Double fare to you if you make it in twenty.”

At Whitehall he would find Lynn, who was a man of resource. Hitherto Baxcombe had had no time for reflection, and now he would not reflect. Once his face contracted in a spasm of pain as he thought of her; then it again grew stern. Men do not think vividly at such times, and he soon fell into a kind of stupor, which lasted throughout the drive. When they reached Whitehall it was pitch dark, and, tossing the driver a half-sovereign, he stumbled down the steps.

“Well?” said a familiar voice out of the blackness. “Speak softly.”

“I hope I have killed him.”

The Thames lapped the foot of the stairs.

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As Baxcombe's eyes grew more accustomed to the gloom he caught sight of a boat in which were seated two men with muffled oars.

"That boat," said the baronet, rapidly, "is from the bark *Ville de Havre*. She cleared this afternoon for Dieppe, and is laying to three miles down. She will carry you to France. There is a corvette at the mouth, but it isn't likely that they can get word to her in time. There is a semaphore station there, but the weather is thick. I've told Smalley, the master of the bark, that you are running from a Fleet sentence. He is well paid and will hold a civil tongue. Have you money?"

"A few pounds."

"Take this."

He pressed a wallet into Baxcombe's unwilling hands.

"Godspeed to you! Let me know when you reach Paris, if you make for there, but be careful what you write."

"You're a demned good fellow," choked the refugee. "I—"

"Never mind that," the baronet sternly said. "Into the boat now!"

Baxcombe pressed the other's hand.

"Good-bye, Lynn, and God bless you! If you will only give an eye to her."

"I will," he promised, with a break in his

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voice; then, leaning forward, he bade the oarsmen fall to.

The boat slipped out into the river and headed down stream. One by one the lights of the city twinkled and disappeared.

The bark proved to be a vessel of not more than sixty tons, notable for her graceful run and the height of her mizzen-mast.

“Boat ahoy!” sang out her skipper.

“Ay, it’s us,” the boat responded.

As the dory crept up to the bark the master leaned over the rail.

“Step lively, sir. I’ve been held four ‘ours now, and thar’ll be a spankin’ breeze in a minit to take us down river.”

Painters were attached to the thwarts of the boat, which was swung up and lashed, while the canvas was ballooning to the freshening wind.

“Glad to meet you, Mr. Whitly, sir,” said Smalley. “Came aboard sort o’ light, eh? Suppose you was in a hurry? Well, sir, you won’t find this ‘ere craft an East-Indiaman, by a demn sight, but we’ll do what we kin. Scroggins, show the gentlemen to ‘is cabin.”

Scroggins led the way aft, and tumbled down a companion-way into a cuddy-hole with two ports.

“This ‘ere’s it,” he explained. “If you want

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a bite to eat and a noggin of Jamaica you kin 'ave it."

After a few moments the man returned with a decanter of water, a flask, and a dirty glass.

"Be thar anything else you want?"

"Nothing."

The creaking of timbers and the clattering of blocks bespoke that the *Ville de Havre* had begun her voyage. Baxcombe locked the door and pulled the dirty green curtains across the ports. After pouring out a drink of rum, and soaking it with water that reeked of bilge, he counted the contents of the purse thrust upon him by the baronet. It contained one hundred pounds. His passage was paid, so, altogether, he possessed nearly one hundred and fifty pounds. The route from Dieppe to Paris lay through Rouen, he knew, and supposed the distance was not more than a hundred miles. Should he take the diligence or should he post? At first thought the diligence, because he would be one of many; but the Englishmen who travelled in France were usually men of wealth and journeyed in state. The fact of doing otherwise would individualize him. The objection to posting lay in the expense. Once in Paris he would be safe, for the police were little likely to exert themselves in behalf of their old enemy, England.

Every few minutes he found his thoughts re-

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verting to Hanover Square; but he refused to think of his wife. That page was turned. Let her go where and with whom she would, he told himself that he did not care.

Gentlemen of fashion did not, however, travel on the Continent with naught save their snuff-boxes and canes; but to buy a complete outfit in Dieppe would invite the attention of the gendarmes. It would be unwise to squander a large sum on a wardrobe that would afterwards prove an elephant, yet luggage he must have, and in plenty. He would ask Smalley to exchange the notes and purchase a trunk and a few simple articles, which would be sent to the inn as having come from the ship.

With this idea in mind he went on deck and was surprised to see that the river was much wider, from which he judged that they were near the mouth.

“Smell the salt, sir?” called Smalley, from aft.

“Are we out?”

“This 'ere's the mouth, and yonder's the watch-dog—that where you see that green light. That's the corvette *Windsor Castle*. We're bearing down to hail.”

Already the bark was dipping to the swell.

“Bark ahoy!” floated from the scarcely discernible vessel of war.

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“Ay, ay!”

A lantern flashed by the corvette’s rail.

“On board the bark! Who are ye, and where bound?”

Baxcombe’s pulse leaped forward like an unreined horse.

“*Ville de Havre*, from up Thames, bound for Dieppe in ballast!” cried Smalley, and added, *sotto voce*, “You needn’t worrit yerself. They know me. Do this ’ere ev’ry v’yage.”

The lantern waved thrice.

“Pass, *Ville de Havre!*” called the corvette, and the danger was over.

“Goin’ ter blow. Be you a good sailor?” asked Smalley.

The wind had freshened, and the Channel was choppy. Deep into the swell the bark poked her nose, and, righting, sprayed water like a wet spaniel. When she luffed to head across Channel the sea soaked over her ’midship rail. Suddenly a gust lifted her, and the next moment the water ran, hissing, over her from bow to stern.

“For’ard thar! Slack them stays’l and tops’l halyards!” roared Smalley. “Mind them balloon-halyards, and stand by! Now, down yer go!” and, with bare poles, the vessel rode out like a champion.

The next night they dropped anchor in the

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Argues, by Dieppe, and from the Soleil d'Or Baxcombe secured a coach with which to take the road. Leaving Dieppe, the highway enters the valley of the Scie, and thirty miles on is Mal-aunay; Rouen lies six miles farther; and there the fugitive put up for the night, in a state of nervous exhaustion which threatened to bring him to his bed. The memory of her prone upon the floor haunted him. It was the hopelessness of it all that ate into his soul. Had there been so much as a ray of doubt he would have borne it better, but she lay unresistingly in the man's arms. He was over-stimulating, and that added to the precariousness of his condition.

The next night was passed at Vernon, seventy-five miles from Dieppe.

“Something is gnawing at that man's heart,” said Dr. Ricquot, at the Taverne d'Abac, to an acquaintance.

“Wine or women?”

“They are concomitants,” the physician replied. “First wine, then women, or, first women, then wine; the end's the same.”

As the coach crossed the Seine for the last time, at Asnières, the traveller was a pitiable sight. Even the peasants stared with pitying eyes at the ghastly pale Englishman with lantern cheeks.

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Then Clichy, and the walls of Paris.

“Qu’avez-vous à déclarer, monsieur?” inquired the customs officer.

“Ne rien,” Baxcombe replied.

Indeed, he had nothing; not even hope.

## XX

AS soon as his master had quitted the house James rushed into the room. The sight of his mistress and the Prince prone upon the floor, the one bathed in blood, so terrified him that, with a wild cry, he collapsed upon the divan.

Annette, who came at his heels, was built of sterner stuff. After one hysterical "Mon Dieu!" she fled into the street, crying out that murder had been done. To the passers-by she endeavored to explain, but in her excitement spoke such mongrel English so volubly that none could understand.

"Come, come!" said a man of professional appearance. "Don't excite yourself. Take time for breath."

"What the devil is it?" asked another.

"Where's the fire?" queried a third, under the impression that a conflagration had started.

"She's crazy," vouchsafed a fourth.

"Or drunk."

By this time the girl was talking, crying, and grimacing like one possessed.

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“Water!” commanded the gentleman who had first spoken; “somebody, quickly!”

A maid ran back into her house and fetched water, which the gentleman tossed in the French-woman’s face. She screamed piercingly, shivered, and came to herself.

“Now,” he said, “I am Dr. Lyngby. Tell me what is the matter.”

Before she had uttered half a dozen words the physician was hurrying to the house. Attracted by the crowd, a hackney-coach drove up.

“Here!” he said, sharply. “Into that coach, one of you, and drive to Bow Street.”

A word in the driver’s ear and the coach dashed away.

“Lock the doors,” the doctor commanded, “and let no one in save the police.”

After a glance at her ladyship, he added:

“Merely fainted.”

Already he was bending over the Prince. The removal of the clotted blood revealed an abrasion and slight contusion.

“Fetch me a basin of water and a pillow-case,” the physician said to James, who was moaning and rocking to and fro on the divan. Seizing him by the coat-collar, the doctor shook him into sensibility and despatched him upon the errand.

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Lady Baxcombe moaned.

"It won't do to let her come to here," he said to Annette, who was fairly composed. "What room is that in there?"

"Ze grande salon, monsieur."

"We'll carry her in."

By the time that was done the tottering James was back. Tearing the pillow-case into strips, the doctor washed and bandaged the wound, placed a cushion under the royal head, and waited.

"Come, be a man!" he said, tartly, to the flunkey. "What happened here?"

"Hi'm that flustered, yer 'onor, hi cawn't—"

"Nonsense! That French girl is worth half a dozen of you. Where's your backbone?"

"There was ha pistol-shot, hand hi—"

"What happened before the shot?"

"Hi don't know," the man stammered. "They was scuffling, hand then hi 'eard ha fall; then the tyble went hover, hand my marster cyme hout."

"Before the shot?"

"Oh no. Hafterwards, sir."

"Was he excited?"

"Hi don't know. 'E seemed to me natural loike."

The Prince moved, and the physician, bending over, inquired if there was pain.

"My head!" his Highness groaned.

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“Your Highness must rest quietly.”

“Is the man dead?” asked the Prince.

“To whom does your Highness refer?”

“E—’is ’Ighness means my marster, sir.”

At that moment Lady Baxcombe screamed and fainted again.

“Take her up-stairs!” commanded the Prince.  
“She bothers me.”

The doctor, with grim lips, saw that her ladyship was put to bed in her own room.

“Who is the family physician?” he asked Annette.

“Doctaire Prengle.”

“Send for him. I must look after the Prince.”

By that time the royal coach had returned, and the postilions, with chattering teeth and knocking knees, drove his Highness and the man of medicine to Carlton House, where Inspector Frawley, of Bow Street, followed, after having examined the premises in Hanover Square, and stationed constables at the doors.

From the Bell Tavern the trail was lost. The man who drove Baxcombe to Whitehall kept a discreet silence. It was settled that the fugitive had not left London by coach, and after a house-to-house search of the city the police concluded that their quarry had crossed the Channel. The vessels clearing from the port

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of London late in the afternoon of the day of the assault were but five—*The Half Moon*, for Antwerp, with linen; *The Siren*, for Jamaica, with merchandise and stores; *The Norse King*, for Copenhagen, with tobacco; *The Sea Wave*, for Philadelphia, with merchandise, and the *Ville de Havre*. After these were despatched the sloops-of-war *George II.*, *General Wolfe*, *King Alfred*, *Crecy*, and the corvette *Halifax*, which latter met and boarded the *Ville de Havre*, bound in, ten miles off the English coast. Master Smalley, who scented trouble the moment the *Halifax* luffed and signalled, sturdily denied, as did all his crew, that the bark had carried a passenger.

The corvette then proceeded to Dieppe, flying a flag of truce, where her commander learned that an English seaman had exchanged Bank of England notes for French gold, but there were half a dozen English and American craft in the Argues at that time, all of which had since sailed, and the bank officials failed to identify Smalley.

The proprietor of the *Soleil d'Or*, when questioned, as the other innkeepers had been, declared that there were many gentlemen in his house that day; Monsieur le Commandant could scarcely expect him to judge their nationalities. Yes, there were three young men who looked as though they might be English; one

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sailed on the *Cardinal Richelieu* for Lisbon, the second took passage on the *À Bas la Bastille* for the Piræus, and the third journeyed to Paris. The tavern-keeper was sorry if his poor fund of information was not up to the expectations of Monsieur le Commandant.

So the corvette returned to England empty-handed, as in time did all the rest. Investigation continued for many months, but finally sickened and died. Some, in the privacies of their homes, declared that it would have been better for England had the heir to the throne done likewise, but that would have been out of the frying-pan into the fire.

Meanwhile, Lady Baxcombe had fought and won the battle for life. Her father, stern churchman, refused to have more to do with her, but the Earl, bent and broken, watched by the bedside throughout all the long nights of delirium, which told him so much that he would not listen to more when health came back to her.

“No, daughter,” he said. “There is no need of denial. I know. We will go back to the Hall, you and I, and try to forget.”

But how could she forget when her husband’s every gesture was engraved on her heart? The old house, with its cryptlike quiet and vivid associations, was the last place she should

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have been, but the Earl was too shattered to heed such things. He drowsed away his days, asleep in his waking moments. Nature was already laboring to still the tortured brain; the blessed hand of Paresis was reaching out.

“He must be aroused, my dear madame,” said the old doctor, “or no power save that above will be able to arouse him. Things must be made more cheerful. You must be lively, sympathetic, responsive.”

Lively! Ah, God!

Yet she tried, bravely, and the effort was pitiable enough to have wrung tears from a sphinx. The old man arose at ten, breakfasted, and retired to the library, where he sat, with a book before him, but never reading, until dinner; after dinner she played or read to him until he fell asleep. That was all.

Once while out walking she came face to face with her father in his pony-chaise. His feeble appearance struck to her heart, and she sprang to the centre of the road, so that he must pull up or drive over her.

“Father!” she cried.

“Father?” he said, vacantly. “Who calls me father?”

“Oh! don’t you know me?” she sobbed. “It’s Hattie, father.”

“Hattie?” he said, wonderingly.

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"Yes," she gently said. "Your little daughter Hattie, father. Don't you remember her?"

His figure straightened.

"I have no daughter Hattie," he said, crisply. "Please stand to one side," and drove on, while Lady Baxcombe knelt in the mud of the highway and sobbed.

Yet it matured her, as only trial can mature a woman, the species of maturity which makes a girl of eighteen view life through the spectacles of eighty.

The gray days of winter gave way to the yellow days of summer, yet her heart ached on. No thought of the injustice of it all—ay! the cruelty of it—occurred to her; only the passionate longing for him or, in lieu of that, news of him. Slowly she starved and grew wan and thin, but her spirit never deserted her. Some day she would be with him again; some day he would believe. It was the sort of hope that supports religions and carries them through epochs of persecution; without it she would have died. Men never know the absorption of a woman's love. God made them incapable of its like.

Daily, almost hourly, the Earl was weakening. As they sat together one evening he bade her stop reading for a moment.

"After my death," he said, slowly, "which

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is not distant, for I am failing fast, you will come into an annuity of ten thousand pounds. There are no conditions attached. I am not one of those who believe in spoiling their last gifts by making them irksome. But I would like to know what are your ideas as to how a young woman in your position should spend that sum."

Shocked at the prospect of discussing such a thing, she replied that she had given no thought to such a contingency, which she hoped would be long deferred.

"That is all nonsense," said the Earl, peevishly. "A dead man can't give attention to his affairs, so the living man must. It won't make the least difference to me, but I think I know what you will do with the money, and I want to know if I am right."

Although it had never occurred to her that she would be a beneficiary under his will, there was but one thought in her mind. She would spend every penny in locating her husband and securing his pardon from the crown. The Earl, in one of those intervals of lucidity peculiar to paresis, had guessed as much. It was, in fact, the chief inducement to so large a legacy. The Earl had not only destroyed everything about the place that could remind him of his son, but had expressly prohibited the mention of the boy's name within his hearing, but he could not

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destroy the love locked in his bosom, nor forget the hallowed look in his wife's eyes when she held the child to her breast.

"What would you wish me to do with it?" she asked.

"You are to do with it as you please."

"What do you think I shall do?"

"I suppose that you will expunge—er—expend"—the paretic habit of misusing words was creeping in again—"the most or all of it in an—an endeavor to dis—discover the whereabouts of your husband."

A wave of red swept to her brow.

"Would—wouldn't you?"

Before she could answer the curtain fell.

"Do you know, I had a peculiar experience this afternoon. I met a poor devil who was starving, and I took him down to the—the place where I keep my bones—you know I have to keep bones—and I gave him one. You should have seen him eat it, and now I have only two bones left—two bones."

These visitations always terrified her, but at night, in the deathly stillness, broken only by the clock and the patter of a rat across the floor, they were harrowing.

The subject was not again mentioned, the periods of rationality growing fewer and fewer and less distinct.

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“It is a matter of weeks,” the doctor sadly said. “It is a pity, a great pity.”

“Is there no hope?” she asked.

“None, absolutely. You have written to the viscount?”

She nodded.

“That is well. The sight of the boy may arouse him.”

“Does he suffer much, doctor?”

“He does not suffer at all, my lady,” the old gentleman replied. “That is the one thing for which we are thankful.”

## XXI

AS Baxcombe's coach rolled over the Paris cobbles the news of the peace of Lunéville was being given to the public. Those who, eight years before, had jeered at the tumbrels were shouting, "Vive Napoléon!" "Vive la France!" even "Vive l'Empereur!" for their First Consul was returning to them crowned with new laurels. It was well that the Alpine campaign had blotted from memory the battle of the Nile, else the fugitive would have found his horses turned loose in the street and his coach demolished.

For the first month the novelty of the situation and the stimulus of his work enabled him to bear up. Then ensued a period of despair. Apart from his fellow-men, lone and forsaken, it was a bitter blow to him to be told that his pictures possessed no artistic value, but the dealers, quick to recognize the dilettante, had full consideration for their wallets and none for the artist.

One day he happened to see the masterpiece by Guérin, "Marcus Sextus," then on exhibition.

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The picture profoundly impressed Baxcombe and imbued him with the spirit of labor. He visited the canvas not once, but a score times, with increasing admiration and reverence. Upon one of these occasions he came into contact with Guérin himself, who, noting the rapt expression with which the young man was studying the work, inquired his opinion of it. He criticised so aptly and, withal, so favorably that the painter revealed himself.

“You seem to know something of art, my young friend,” he said, and the discussion that followed so pleased the master that he accompanied Baxcombe home to see the canvases pronounced impracticable by the dealers.

“They are good, very good,” Guérin said, after examining several. “They are too good, in a way, because they satisfy you and yet are not good enough to satisfy the public, which has not your bias.”

“They don’t satisfy even me, for that matter.”

The master tossed the “*Seine Fleuve*” into a corner.

“Then learn, learn before you try to expound. Go to our *École des Beaux-Arts* and learn all they can teach you; then go to Rome and learn all that is to be learned there; then learn from God. There isn’t a meadow or a stream or a tree in

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France that doesn't defy the best of us. Learn —work! Paint out what you have painted in until there's enough on the canvas to dig with a hoe; then slit it up with a palette-knife, and begin again. Mon Dieu! Do you think I would have been fool enough to give all my life to art if I could have learned it in a week? If you, with your youth, your indulgence, and your lack of training, could paint 'Marcus Sextus,' the canvas would not be worth fifty francs."

"Were you poor when you started?"

"Poor as Watteau, and I thank God for it. It made me work."

"Do you think I have ability?"

"Mon ami," Guérin impressively replied, "the Lord makes some of us for painters, some for sculptors, and others for the belles-lettres. I think He fashioned you for a painter, to the same extent that He gave you boy's shape; but He can no more make a good painter of you than He can make a good man of you. You must do that for yourself, and the cost is great."

"Will it exceed ninety-eight guineas?" the Honorable Donald asked, with the first smile that had graced his lips since Hanover Square.

"Money!" sneered the master. "Money! Who is speaking of money? What has money to do with art, except to feed the artist? I would not alter a tone in 'Marcus' for ten thousand francs!"

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Money! Bah! Conviction makes the painter great; money prostitutes him."

He fell to pacing, excitedly, up and down.

"Money! When Watteau came to Paris he went to work for a man named Metayer, a pitiable decorator of plaster saints, for fifteen francs a month and a daily dish of soup. Think of it! A man like that painting croûtes, called 'Ponts de Notre Dame,' for fifteen francs a month! Yet you talk of money!"

Pausing, he picked up a sketch of a cuirassier and intently examined it, his features softening all the while.

"Would you like to attend the Beaux-Arts, Monsieur Dépetin?" which was Baxcombe's alias. "If you would, I can arrange it for you," by which the good-hearted Guérin meant that he would pay the tuition.

"You — you are too kind, monsieur," the young man stammered. "I fear I am unworthy."

"Pish! As to that, we shall see. It is settled then; and now about feeding this artist," he said, with a smile. "You say you have ninety-some guineas; that is twenty-five hundred francs. You must make that last. You cannot study the masters by daylight and paint croûtes by the lamp. You must move to the south bank. In some of the streets about the

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Rue St. Jacques you may have a room, with café au lait, for twelve francs a week; that will be quite satisfactory. Come!"

Without waiting for possible objection, Monsieur Guérin led the way along the Quai de Gesvres to the Pont Neuf, by which they crossed to the Cité. In the Rue de la Huchette he inquired of the keeper of a *brasserie*, who directed them around the corner to the house of an artisan named Michelot.

"Yes, they would be glad to rent a room to monsieur. Would monsieur look at the room? Monsieur did, and found it to be at the top of a dirty flight of steps. It contained a tumble-down bed, a chair, and a cracked wash-basin, and overlooked the precipitous roofs of the houses at the rear; the window-panes were cobwebbed and filthy; the floor groaned under pressure of foot, but Monsieur Guérin was delighted.

"Ah," he said, "a man can work in an atmosphere like this. In just such a place, mon ami, I struggled and longed and planned."

Turning upon the *grisette*, he demanded the price.

"Twelve francs the week, or forty-five the month, monsieur."

"With café au lait?"

"Certainement, monsieur."

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"We will take it," he roared, "by the month. Eh, Dépetin?"

And, unwilling to offend his benefactor, Baxcombe, with an inward groan, replied:

"By the month, monsieur."

So the fugitive crossed the Seine. Unfortunately, his arrival fell on Saturday, when Michelot received his money, and whenever that happened Michelot got drunk and chastised madame. Although the lodger refrained from interference, the disturbance kept him awake until daylight and the bells of St. Severin were calling to prayers.

He had never realized how wholly his heart belonged to her of Hanover Square. The bells played upon all that was temperamental in him, reproached and taunted him. By closing his eyes he could catch the rustle of her dress, the faint odor of violets, which had always been part of her. Suddenly his heart stumbled and fluttered. No! She was in the man's arms, was there without remonstrance, was guilty!

Célestine Michelot came with the *café au lait* and many apologies for her father's behavior. He watched her clumsily set the tray down, noted the red, stained hands and the sacklike figure, and contrasted them with his wife's grace, pretty white fingers, and rounded contour; the while he reflected that the *grisette's* husband,

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under similar conditions, would have beaten his wife with a stave and gone on as before.

The next day he entered the École des Beaux-Arts, giving out that he was of French parentage, but had been reared in England, and was assigned to the life class.

At the adjoining easel was a young Frenchman named Montpensier, whose place commanded a three-quarter view of the nude model, a Piedmontese by birth, one Margaret. Evidently Montpensier was not pleased with his efforts, for his brow had puckered and a red tide was creeping from his throat to his temples.

“*Sacré bleu!*” he muttered, and, catching Baxcombe’s eye, added, comically, “*Fo’ Gawd’s sek!* as you say in English.”

“What is the matter with it?”

“Bah! Look at the flesh tint in the high light! Like the skin of a sucked lemon, like anything and everything save the rose glow of that girl yonder. You are a new-comer, M—?”

“Dépetin—Claude Dépetin. Yes, a new-comer.”

“And I am Raoul Montpensier. But I thought you an Englishman.”

“I have lived in England for the ten years past.”

“Ah! You were émigrés. So were we; at least, so was my family. I was in Turin at the

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time. Now we are back again, all save one—my father."

"And your father?"

"My father was guillotined, monsieur. He refused to flee."

Montpensier painted for several moments in silence, apparently absorbed in the horrors at *De la Concorde*. Then he observed:

"I suppose, then, you have many friends in Paris?"

"No," Baxcombe replied. "I know no one. I am an orphan, and was carried to England at the time of the Revolution by my aunt, who died last year, leaving me a small legacy, which I am expending as you see. My father was French, but my mother was Argentine."

"Then I shall see to it, with your permission, that you do not die of ennui."

"I am grateful to monsieur."

"You are grateful to Raoul, or no gratitude is acceptable," returned the light-hearted Frenchman.

"Then I am grateful to Raoul," said Baxcombe, and so began friendship. The term means more in France than in Britain, for in the former country it is unsexual love.

One evening, as they were sipping cordial in a *brasserie*, Montpensier said:

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"Parbleu! I had forgotten. Some time I must take you to see Madame le Brun."

"Madame le Brun?"

"Is it possible," exclaimed Raoul, "that you have never heard of Vigée le Brun? Ciel! There is scarce a crowned head in Europe she has not painted. You astound me."

"I am forever astounding you," said the Honorable Donald. "Again, who is she?"

"I must tell you what she is not; that is the only way to make clear what she is. Bien! She is no longer young. Her sweetness and graciousness have not been affected by laurels such as few women attain, nor has her contact with the world tarnished her virtue. Her—bah! I make a mess of it! You must see her, mon ami, and talk with her. She is without a peer as an artist, and as woman, wife, and mother she is equally peerless. The rest you must gather for yourself. When will you go?"

"My wardrobe is illy adapted to a salon."

"Pish!" retorted Montpensier. "She was presented in a muslin dress costing ten francs to the Czar of Russia. Garçon, l'addition, s'il vous plaît!"

## XXII

MADAME LE BRUN was, perhaps, the most ideal artist the world has ever known. Wonderful as were the products of her brush, from "The Man with a Beard," an effort of her first decade, to "Venus qui Lie les Ailes de l'Amour," they were not more wonderful than the temperament which permitted her to carry her girlishness to the grave. Femininity was the key-note to her character, an airy, rollicking, lovable femininity with an undercurrent of seriousness. Neither fame nor riches nor a rakish husband could make of her anything but a slip of a girl, nor could any power save the divine power have made her aught than an artist.

Beautiful, gracious, and sympathetic, Elizabeth Louise Vigée seemed adapted to conquest at the Petit Trianon, but instead of competing with the Queen she painted her; instead of being a butterfly she became a genius.

After an absence from Paris of twelve years, she was back in the Rue Gros Chenet, and her house was the Mecca for the cults of fashion, art,

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and letters. There was never such another unobtrusive hostess. Save when she welcomed her guests, sang for them—and she sang like a thrush—or bade them adieux, she was little in evidence. She wished her home to be a meeting-place for men and women of distinction, because they seemed to enjoy themselves; it never occurred to her that she was the attraction.

Always charming, always apparently happy, her friends were a host, but so jealous was she of her time that few were intimates. Even her daughter was a rival of her art. As for Monsieur le Brun, he scarcely counted. Rake, *roué*, gambler, he had but little in common with his wife, and each went their way—gay ways, but of a vastly different species of gayety.

To a woman of forty, then, with the face, figure, and manner of a girl, Baxcombe was introduced.

“This is *mon ami*, Monsieur Dépetin, of whom I have so often spoken,” said Raoul.

“Then he is my friend, if he wills,” said madame.

“It is seldom that one’s will can accomplish so much,” returned Monsieur Dépetin.

A beautiful woman, having seated herself by her harp, was caressing the strings; few harpists excelled Juliette Récamier. As the strains of “*Amorita Mia*” stole from the instrument, Bax-

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combe fixed his mournful eyes upon the player. Their relative positions were such that Madame Récamier could see him while apparently giving her sole attention to the harp. By her stood a man of spare visage, of whom, without slurring a note of the limpid air, she inquired:

“Pray, Monsieur Talleyrand, who is yonder melancholy Dane?”

The thin lips of the great man parted in a smile.

“He is no Dane,” he replied, “and I surmise his melancholia is due to the Juliette of his Romeo.”

She threw him a saucy glance.

“Melancholia of that kind is the plaything of boys, Monsieur Talleyrand.”

“To wit: Monsieur Bonaparte,” said the statesman, slyly.

The infatuation of Lucien Bonaparte, brother of the First Consul, for Madame Récamier, to whom he wrote the longest and most passionate of letters, was the delight of the Paris of the salons. The while they were talking Baxcombe continued his scrutiny, innocent of the presence of the fair harpist. Music greatly affected and stimulated him. He was thinking of home.

“Are you fond of music, Monsieur Dépetin?” inquired his hostess.

“It is the best religion, madame,” he replied,

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so earnestly that she looked more carefully at him.

"I think you are very nearly right," she said, after a moment, "yet music has a sensual side."

"He who searches may find impropriety in the Bible, madame. You and I are content with its beauties."

"Did you enjoy my playing, monsieur? You seemed vastly attentive."

"Madame le Brun and I have just been comparing music and religion. Your rendition was a book of revelation, madame."

"That is very clever of you; many thanks, monsieur."

"Evidently monsieur does not share in the failing of his countrymen," said a lady.

"Which is?"

"Stupidity at repartee. You act as leaven to the rest of my English acquaintances," said the lady, Madame de Staël, heavy, coarse, brilliant.

"Madame mistakes my nationality," he said. "I wear the tricolor."

No sooner had the words left his lips than the blood mounted to his forehead. What business had he there in such guise? Was he not an interloper, an accursed liar, and a sneak? Impulsively he made his way to Madame le Brun, intending to withdraw, and on the mor-

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row explain and apologize. No thought of the danger of such a course obscured his view of the right; none of the Baxcombes were cowards. But, as he approached, Madame le Brun turned to a young girl at her side.

“Monsieur Dépetin, allow me to present you to my daughter,” and there was no alternative but to gracefully submit.

“You are a stranger in Paris, monsieur?” inquired the girl, in whom was the reflection of her mother’s beauty and a stateliness of carriage which her mother lacked.

“Since the emigration, mademoiselle,” he lied.

“Ah, yes,” she said, with a little laugh, “that is almost understood. I believe you and mamma have a common interest.”

“To the degree that mine is common and hers most uncommon, yes.”

“Monsieur is facetious?”

“Is sincere.”

“Did you emigrate to England?”

“To England, mademoiselle. I returned to France but a short while ago.”

“Ah!” the girl exclaimed, with interest. “Then you were in London, mayhap, at the time the attempt was made to assassinate the Prince?”

Beyond paling slightly, Baxcombe gave no intimation of emotion.

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“Yes, I was in London at the time.”

“Tell me,” said mademoiselle, softly. “They say it was over une affaire d’amour; they say she is a bad woman. Is that so?”

“I think she is a very good woman,” he quietly replied.

The doubt had leaped to conviction. Something in his tone attracted the girl.

“You know her?” she asked, tentatively.

“Very slightly, mademoiselle. I have met her, that is all.”

He had, indeed, met but never known her. Mademoiselle le Brun would have asked further but for the coming of Monsieur Talleyrand.

“You are to be congratulated, Monsieur Dépetin,” said he.

“Yes?”

“Most assuredly yes. The man who can win in five minutes the favor of Madame Récamier and that of the brilliant De Staël is a paragon of cleverness. I have your repute from them, monsieur.”

“I congratulated Madame Récamier upon her rendition—that was from the heart—and to Madame de Staël I cheaply alluded to the tricolor.”

“No matter,” said the statesman; “repute is not always won by worth. I am to take you to your mother, mademoiselle.”

Madame le Brun’s receptions were invariably

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over by half after eleven, and as soon as the initial move was made Baxcombe sought his hostess.

“I am glad that the evening has proven enjoyable, monsieur. I hear such flattering accounts of you, you must come often,” madame said, in response to his few words of appreciation.

“May I so promptly accept as to ask a few moments to-morrow?” he queried.

“I breakfast to-morrow with the First Consul, but I shall be at home after three, if monsieur chooses to call.”

“At three I shall be here. Bonsoir, madame. Je vous remercie.”

Bending, he kissed her finger-tips.

“Bonsoir, monsieur.”

“*Épris?*” suggested Madame Récamier, when he was out of earshot.

“Oh, non!” replied Madame de Staël. “He is a genius. All geniuses are droll. I am, myself. Voilà!”

On the street he was overtaken by Montpensier.

“What! Going off without me?”

“I had forgotten you.”

“Comme ça! That is not complimentary.”

“Yet it is true.”

The disgracefulness of his position towards Madame le Brun was harassing him.

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"All of your friends are good friends," said Montpensier.

"Why?"

"Because if they were not they would not put up with your English humor," chuckled the Frenchman.

"Pardon me!" the Honorable Donald said, after they had walked for some time in silence. "I was brusque, but I have much to worry me."

"Bah! While the trees stay green and the sky blue there is no such thing as worry. Shall I prescribe for you? Bien! Une cognac, fine champagne; if the trouble does not abate, repeat in half an hour. Here is a dispensary. Come."

They sat but a little while in the *brasserie*, and then parted.

Underneath the candlestick, on his table, Baxcombe found a letter from Lynn. Breaking the seal, he spread the letter open. It ran:

"DEAR SIR TRAVELLER,—Yours of the 30th came to hand by to-day's post. Now that every one has gone to the spas, there is little worth chronicling, save that my father is trying to marry me to Gwendolin, second daughter of Lord Capehart, on account of her dot of twenty thousand pounds. She is eighteen years of age, tall and gawky of figure, but, report has it, good-natured and sensible. My father insists that she is 'improvable,' and that where twenty thousand pounds are concerned face and shape are not to be reckoned with. There is more sound judgment in the last

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clause than in the first, and I may, in time, muster sufficient courage to make the leap. A man at my time of life is apt to entertain a fairly good opinion of celibacy; but we shall see.

“You will rejoice to hear that the Prince has fully recovered from the wound inflicted by that scoundrelly Baxcombe, whom, as you well know, I tolerated only for the Earl’s sake. He is supposed to have fled to the Orient.

“I shall be off for Bath in a few days, so address No. 33 Conduit Street, Bath. The place is getting less and less fashionable, but that means lower and lower prices; so I am content. My purse is a mighty inducement to matrimony.

“I understand that the Earl, Baxcombe’s father, is in failing health. The trend of opinion is that Lady Baxcombe was innocent, though how people figure innocence from the circumstances is beyond me. A letter from young Broughton tells me that she is pining away for the fellow, who is scarce worth an error ha’penny.

“If this letter is disjointed and stupid, take pity on a head that small-beer will not assuage. You understand the paucity of news at this time of year, and will be easy on me.

Affect.,

“LYNN.

“LYNN HOUSE, July 18, 1801.”

With a groan, Baxcombe pushed the paper away and dropped his head upon his hand. The bells of St. Severin struck two, three, and he kept the position. The candle flared up and went out, leaving him lost in thought as black as the shadows about him.

## XXIII

AS Claude Dépetin began putting away his brushes the next afternoon, two hours earlier than was his wont, Professor Maibleu framed a scowl.

“Ah!” exclaimed Montpensier. “You are off?”

“Yes. I am to be at Madame le Brun’s at three.”

The Frenchman laughed softly.

“Well?” said Baxcombe.

“Nothing, mon ami; I was merely thinking.”

“Of what?”

Sticking his brush behind his ear, Montpensier looked mischievously into the other’s face, and asked: “Need I put it into words?”

“As you please.”

Again the Frenchman laughed.

“I was merely thinking, mon ami, that of all mademoiselle’s conquests this has been the least trouble to mademoiselle.”

“Mademoiselle what?”

“Mademoiselle what? Sacré! Mademoiselle le Brun.”

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"And who the devil told you my visit has to do with her?"

"Messieurs," broke out old Maibleu, "we do not teach the art of conversation here."

An hour later Célestine dropped the fine gentleman a courtesy, while her eyes dilated. That which passes for fashion in the Rue Zacharie would not adorn Rotten Row. Although he had arrayed himself with care, he was conscious that his frock suffered in the sunlight and that no amount of polishing could restore his boots to newness. As he passed the Brasserie Montignol the proprietor, who had summoned his wife to share the treat, bowed elaborately. The keeper of the little *magasin de tabac* omitted to speak for staring. It was a bitter ordeal, and Baxcombe was glad to set foot on the Pont des Arts, which, in carrying him to the north bank, relieved him from inquisitive eyes.

When he turned into the Rue de Gros Chenet his heart was fluttering. Unaccustomed to deceit, he knew not how best to explain to this cultured woman the circumstances which had led him to appear in her house under false pretences. Prudence warned him against placing himself in her power by telling too much, while rudimentary politeness bade him tell enough or nothing. As the knocker slipped from his fingers, he was wondering whether or not she would have him

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denounced. It did not much matter. His soul had been fettered so long that manacled hands and a ball to his foot would be in keeping.

Madame had not returned from the First Consul's, but the Honorable Donald was shown into the *petit salon*, draped in yellow silk and decorated in gold. Upon the wall hung the "Mademoiselle Camargo" of Lancret, who had put into it all of his own passion for the dancer who played the Catherine of hearts. As Baxcombe dwelt upon the exquisite finish of the picture, in the style of Watteau, the idea occurred to him to again start a portrait of his wife. The scarlet flush indicative of emotion swept to his brow. He would begin at once and paint her, not as she always was, but as he alone had been privileged to see her. He would paint her soul, along with her lovely eyes and fair skin. He would paint as one inspired, and not the wealth of the Indies should purchase the canvas. He would keep it for himself, and by it there should always be a bunch of the violets she loved. By deceiving two of the senses he meant to lull another to repose. Baxcombe was nearer French than he knew.

The rustling of a dress then thrust reality upon him, and he turned to face Madame le Brun.

"I have been admiring your Lancret, madame."

"Yes? It is charming, spirituelle, but it is

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only *after* Watteau, who was peerless. Monsieur le Brun purchased it for me while I was in Russia. You must pardon me for keeping you waiting, monsieur."

"I fear the weight of pardon is to be yours."

"Will you not be seated, monsieur?"

"I find myself in a most difficult position, madame," he continued, stiffly. "I have placed myself before you in a gravely misleading light, without any intention of doing so. It is painful for me to reflect that I have so transgressed; doubly so, because it must terminate our acquaintance."

She was listening with dignity and poise. When he paused she quietly observed: "I am all attention, monsieur."

"I was introduced to you by Monsieur Montpensier, for whom I have conceived the warmest regard, as 'Claude Dépetin.' It is almost needless to say that Monsieur Montpensier had every reason to believe that I was as I represented myself to be. Madame, my name is Donald Currie Baxcombe. I am the younger son of the Earl of Tweeddale, and it is upon my head that the British government has put a price in connection with the injuries inflicted upon the Prince of Wales."

Madame's lips parted, but no sound came from them.

"After that thing happened I came to France,

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to Paris, and chose the name of Dépetin, because it was the first to cross my mind. I gave it upon entering the École des Beaux-Arts, and Monsieur Montpensier, whose easel is next to mine, naturally addressed me by that name. Having taken it, I had to invent a family; so the thing spread. When Monsieur Montpensier suggested that I accompany him to one of your delightful receptions, it did not occur to me that I was infringing propriety, so accustomed had I become to being addressed as Monsieur Dépetin. That is all, madame. If you will accept it as a partial excuse and believe that I am deeply regretful, I shall be grateful."

"Have you reflected, monsieur," she said, "that I may consider it my duty to prevent you from leaving the house while I notify the authorities?"

"Yes," he replied, clinching his teeth.

"In that event it seems to me you exhibit a very superior order of courage, monsieur."

"It was a duty that had to be performed, madame."

"And of breeding," she added, musingly.

If there is one thing more attractive than girlish vivacity it is girlish seriousness. Madame le Brun's face softened as her artistic perception fathomed him. Here was a man capable of the ideal—the height of the brow showed that;

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capable of intense emotion and the subject of colossal pride—the eyes bore witness; and likely to be swept to destruction through pernicious example—it lurked about the corners of the mouth. A man, then, both strong and weak, ofttimes stronger than the strongest, sometimes the weakest of the weak.

“What do you think I should do, monsieur?”

“I, madame? I have no opinion.”

“What did you think I would do?”

“I gave it no thought,” he replied, simply.

“You possess an interesting character, Monsieur Baxcombe. You are waiting for me to decide. Well, then,” she said, prettily, “hear me: When a man, monsieur, has sufficient moral courage to do what he thinks right, without regard to consequences, his character is so ably attested that I have no fear of him. If Monsieur ‘Dépetin’”—she gave the name a lingering emphasis—“chooses to number me among his friends and favor me with his company, I shall feel honored, monsieur.”

Patently affected, he essayed to speak, but could not.

“In return for my—my mercy, monsieur,” she said, almost childishly, “I have one favor to ask.”

“Any, madame,” he stammered.

“Remember, then,” she said, with infinite

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tenderness, "that as honor is to a man so is virtue to a woman. She, too, will die rather than sacrifice it. That is all the gratitude I wish, monsieur."

"I shall prove grateful, madame," he soberly replied, and left her.

## XXIV

VISCOUNT SHERCLIFFE, the Earl's eldest son, arrived at the Hall, from Vienna, on the 19th of July. His coming rendered things still more difficult for her ladyship, because he took no pains to conceal his belief in her guilt and his consequent abhorrence of her. Polite he was to a fault, but her position became almost untenable before he had been thirty-six hours under the roof.

Archibald, Viscount Shercliffe, was of the dogmatic, aggressive type. Tact he had in plenty, but he reserved the most of it for usage in the affairs of the legation. His autocratic manner was due, in great part, to his muscular superiority, which led him to believe himself mentally superior as well.

One evening he requested Lady Baxcombe to grant him a few moments' conversation in the library. The Earl was confined to bed. Although the weather was sultry, the viscount latched the window overlooking the garden, explaining that he wished to avoid any possibility of their being overheard.

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“If you please, we will come promptly to the point,” he said. “You are aware, I believe, that upon my father’s death a legacy of ten thousand pounds falls to you. Am I correct so far?”

“Yes. At least, the Earl told me that such a provision had been made.”

“Yes,” he said, “the provision has been made, and it is about that I intend speaking. If you are a woman of sound judgment you will have no fault to find with what I have to say, but whether you find fault or not it is my duty to say it. In the first place, I want you to rid your mind of any idea you may have that I am opposed to you, personally, or opposed to your sharing in the estate.”

“I have no such idea,” she wonderingly interposed.

“The Earl is in such a state of health that he could be easily imposed upon. Mind, I do not say that you have practised any imposition; I do not even insinuate such a thing. I merely say it could be, and the world will coincide in that view. On account of the most deplorable business which led my brother to disaster, your repute, justly or unjustly, has suffered.”

“Do you think it manly to tell me of it?”

“It is true. I am taking the abstract view—other people’s view.”

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"That view has no interest for me," she retorted, proudly.

"It has for me, madame, since it concerns my family. To go back, your repute has suffered, and, sad to say, your father appears to believe that it suffers justly."

She bowed her head.

"I need not tell you that such a course upon his part has great influence in moulding public opinion against you."

He paused, as though to nerve himself for an ordeal.

"If you accept the annuity, madame—a disproportionate one—society will say that it was wrung from a feeble-minded old man by an artful woman. Society is proverbially merciless."

Her eyes flashed.

"I am sure you will agree with me that such comment is greatly to be avoided. You do agree, do you not?"

"Go on," she said, tensely.

"If you will go to my father and tell him that you cannot, in justice to yourself, accept more than two thousand a year, I will afterwards add the other eight from my share of the estate, leaving no one the wiser. If you do not care to trust to my word, and I suppose you do not, I will enter into written agreement. You may think it over and let me know in the morning.

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I am positive that you will see that it is your duty to the Earl, to yourself, and to me."

"Is that all?"

"That is all."

"Then I will give you my answer now. It is, No! I had nothing to do with any of the provisions. I never dreamed that I would be a beneficiary under the will until he told me. I cannot help what people think. They cannot steal my conscience from me, and I shall not put myself in a position which might be used as evidence against me. You advise me to be just to myself. I am when I tell you no."

"You disincline me to the common belief, madame," he said, ironically.

"What you believe is of utter indifference to me," she said. "Good-night."

"Good-night," he coldly returned.

After that she was left so utterly alone that the weight of sorrow grew almost insupportable. Acting, doubtless, under the viscount's injunction, the physician declined to allow her to be with the Earl. She wandered about the house, like a babe in the woods, held there by a sense of duty, barring which she would have long since quitted the place.

The walk past the stile and through the woods to the lake, the point where the hunter had loomed above her in a mass of satiny body and beat-

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ing hoofs, and the outlet from the breakfast-room windows were shrines to her. She splashed pebbles into the water, caressed the boxwood branches, and ate her heart out with longing. There were days when she loved the Hall and days when she hated it; days when she came near to stifling, even in the untrammelled woods, and days when she lingered among the trees, rapt in that emotional phase which, in women, creates from nothing to supply everything the soul most needs. Heart-sick? Ay, heart-sick with that sickness which is akin to nausea.

She was no longer permitted to direct the household affairs. Perkins was a good creature in her way, but it was a way within the limits of self-preservation, and she took her cue from the master soon to be. In every manner permissible to gentility the viscount intimated that the girl's position was a graceless one, and would terminate with the decease of the Earl.

On the 12th of August, at four-thirty in the morning, the Earl died, without recovering from the stupor into which he had fallen on the 10th. Two days later he was laid to rest in the family burial-ground. The reading of the will was set for the 15th.

About the walls of the living-room chairs were placed to accommodate the relatives, who were

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somewhat disturbed for fear her ladyship would fall heir to an excessive sum.

Sir Charles Lakton, K.C., a white-haired man of great ability, and for thirty-eight years the legal adviser of the deceased, read the will. To the prelude, tracing man's descent from Adam, no one paid attention, but from the time the first clause was reached the interest was impressive.

Lady Baxcombe, in heavy mourning, sat with the Earl, directly in front of Sir Charles, and seemed several times on the verge of swooning under the intense heat, which was aggravated by the odor of crêpe. Lady Treeburton, niece of the dead man, settled back in her chair with a sigh of relief at the intelligence that fifteen thousand guineas were to be hers; the Marchioness of Scavenage breathed easier to know that her daughter's next London season was assured.

“To Lady Baxcombe, wife of my son Donald Currie Baxcombe,” began the counsellor—at mention of her husband's name Lady Baxcombe was seen to tremble; whispering and the rustling of fans ceased, and only an angry fly at the window-pane disturbed the quiet—“I do bequeath an annuity of four hundred pounds, said annuity to be paid from the interest of my four per cent. East India bonds, and to be payable on the first day of January next, and thereafter on the first day of each succeeding

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January, at Child's Banking-House, in Fleet Street, by Temple Bar, in the city of London. This annuity, in the event of the depreciation of said bonds, is to take precedence of all other annuities chargeable to my estate, and said other annuities will then be payable in ratio to such depreciation. In the event of failure of said bonds, my son and heir, the Viscount Shercliff, now Earl of Tweeddale, is hereby charged, directed, and beseeched to on no account allow this annuity to fail, but to pay it, if necessary, from his private purse. [Her ladyship gave no sign of comprehension.] To my son Donald Currie Baxcombe I am able, under the laws of my country, to bequeath nothing save the heritage of a life-long devotion and love. When one looks back through the years, it is not so poor a bequest as at first appears. Among my papers, in the upper left-hand drawer of my *escritoire*, will be found a letter addressed to him, and I hereby charge my eldest son, the Viscount Shercliff, now Earl of Tweeddale, to deliver said letter to him, Donald Currie Baxcombe, whenever the delivery becomes possible under either the clemency of princes or the mercy of God, to both of whom I commend him."

With a formal conclusion the document ended. Lady Baxcombe, weeping, was led away, and that evening the majority of the relatives left

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for their homes. The following night the Earl departed for Vienna, leaving a letter for her ladyship with Perkins. It ran:

“MADAME,—I hope that you treasure no ill feeling in regard to the reduced amount of the annuity. Fully resolved to leave no stone unturned, as far as I was concerned, to preserve the honor of our family, I succeeded in inclining my father to the only proper view of the matter. In doing so I was not actuated by the least enmity towards you, and I hope you will accept, at its true worth, my pride in the universal recognition of our integrity.

“That much being, in this respect, assured, I shall be pleased to restore the annuity, on word from you, to its original value of ten thousand pounds. There is no occasion for you to experience any qualms of conscience anent it, since it was my father’s wish, and the point yielded was purely a technicality to subserve appearances.

“Please address me care of the English Embassy, Vienna, Austria.

“I have made arrangements to close the old place during my absence, but do not let my plans hasten your departure. As long as you wish to remain at the Hall, Perkins will minister to your wants.

“Enclosed is my check for seventy-five pounds, which I beg you to accept in order that you may be provided for until the 1st of January. Consider it, if you like, as a loan chargeable to the yearly sum.

“Believe me, my dear madame,

“Yours most sincerely,

“TWEEDDALE.

“BAXCOMBE HALL, STAFFS., *August 17, 1801.*”

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After burning the letter she placed the check in an envelope, ready for posting to its donor, and pulled the bell-rope.

"I wish the chaise to be ready at noon to-morrow, Perkins, to drive me to Stafford, where I shall take stage for the city."

"Very good, my lady," said Perkins, glad of a chance to visit her own people. "When will your ladyship return?"

"Never," she faltered.

The word was like a knell. After all, the one great day of her life had transpired at the Hall.

"I will tell Richards, my lady, afore he goes to bed."

Outside the elms rustled in the breeze, and over in the church-yard the green grasses waved over all that was mortal of him who once was master there.

## XXV

BEFORE the Café Parmentier, in the Rue de Brueghel, sat two lieutenants of hussars, smoking pipes and drinking cordials. With the peace of Amiens had come a lull in the song of the sword, and they were privileged to enjoy again the delights of a Parisian fall. Splendid pictures of fighting-men they were, in their scarlet - flapped shakos, fur - bordered dolmans, and immaculate boots. At every move spurs jingled and sabres clanked against the cobbles.

As they lounged and smoked they dwelt upon their campaigns, until the coming of a pretty woman caused them to drop into graceful poses.

“ Bonjour, mam’selle,” said one.

“ Pas ce matin,” she flung over her shoulder; “ demain.”

In the girl’s wake strolled a dandy, English despite his French costuming.

“ Un monsieur anglais,” said the hussar, insolently, but the civilian took no notice of the affront.

“ Bonjour, mam’selle,” he said to the girl.

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“Bonjour, m’sieur,” she demurely responded, without glancing in his direction; that she had long since done.

“When two people, one so charming and the other so lonely, chance to meet, it seems a prank of Providence. I recommend myself to mademoiselle.”

“Parbleu!” she said. “Monsieur is not dif-fident.”

“Had he been so he would not have met mademoiselle.”

“You are an Englishman?”

“Is it safe to say so to a Parisienne?”

“Tiens!” she replied, shrugging her shoulders. “The army has no Amazon legion.”

“That was clever of mademoiselle.”

“One must be something nowadays if one is poor, either clever or bad.”

“And you are clever?”

She turned her cold, gray eyes upon him, and said, with something like a sneer:

“It would spoil sport to tell monsieur. I work for my living, if that is what you mean.”

“Shameful! You should play, not work.”

“Tiens!” she said, with a *moue*. “I play, too.”

“At work?”

“Ask the students, monsieur.”

“You teach?”

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“No, monsieur,” she said, with a gesture of despair. “I am a model, if you please, in the École des Beaux-Arts. My name is Margaret. My ancestry, Piedmontese. Voilà! The family history! Margaret is thirsty, monsieur. She suggests that we have a vermouth at the brasserie yonder.”

“Well?”

“And monsieur is too much of a gentleman to refuse.”

Her naïveté pleased him.

“You are a philosopher,” he said.

“When one is poor one’s café au lait is sweetened with it. Let us cross to the taverne, monsieur.”

“You said you were employed at the Arts,” he remarked, when they were seated. She nodded, spinning her liqueur-glass between her fingers.

“Do you know a man by the name of Baxcombe? He is an old friend of mine, and, I believe, is in Paris.”

“An Englishman?”

“Yes.”

“No, monsieur. There are no Englishmen in the school.”

After chatting for a few moments the girl arose.

“But I can’t permit you to go,” he said.

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“Then I must go without permission; but if you wish to see me again you may. When do you wish it to be?”

“To-night,” he promptly returned, “for supper.”

“Bien! At eight, let us say—the east façade of the Tuileries. But it must be a good supper, Monsieur—?”

“Sieur Temple. It shall be a good one, Mademoiselle Margaret. Au revoir.”

“Au revoir. Cette nuit.”

After a season’s exile in Italy he had wandered to Austria, and then had taken advantage of the peace of Amiens to visit Paris before returning home. Logically, Paris would afford the safest refuge to Baxcombe, whom Temple considered his enemy of enemies. It was possible that they might meet. If they should meet—well, what then? He could report to the embassy, and the ambassador would hold counsel with the police, to the end that the fugitive would be returned to England, to his grave. But there would be no revenge in that. Doubtless the hunted boy would die a martyr’s death and be glorified by maudlin sentiment. “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,” saith the Koran, and so said the baronet. He wished to strike at the heart; the longer the life, then, the longer the misery.

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Meanwhile, in the Rue Zacharie, work on the portrait had progressed. Days scurried by, weeks glided into months, but the Honorable Donald painted on. The news of his father's death had come as a terrible blow and been forgotten, or was remembered only as an incident of the nightmare past. He lived for and in the portrait. The red in his hollow cheeks glowed with a scarlet glow, and frenzy gleamed in his eyes. The picture seemed an atonement. He was starving, day by day, that "Lady Baxcombe" might have roses in her pigment cheeks and life in her eyes. What mattered it that his last *sous* had gone to purchase violets to place by her painted self, because she had loved violets? Their scent was better than bread. Disease! There is no disease like cancer of the heart; no nausea such as the heart can know.

In vain Montpensier pleaded for some relaxation; there could be none. In vain Guérin the generous taxed Baxcombe with ingratitude, and raged at him for his neglect of himself; there was no change for the better, and the master could waste neither time nor money upon such. The École des Beaux-Arts cast him out, and still he painted on.

"Absinthe!" murmured some. "Poor devil!"

But it was not absinthe.

In vain Madame le Brun implored him to rest,

## THE HARVESTERS

if only for a few days; then she sought to compel rest by constant invitation, and failed. At first madame shrugged her shoulders, arguing that her best had been done; but in the end she threw convention to the winds, as in the days of Du Barry, and went to him. If the world could trust her with the mistress of a senile king, it could trust her with a boy.

“The mountain would not come to Mohammed!” she exclaimed to the dismayed artist who faced her, palette in hand. There had been no time in which to cover the sacred portrait.

“Oh!” murmured madame; “how exquisite!”

Her trained gaze dwelt upon a three-quarter-length figure in Rembrandt *chiaroscuro*. A shaft of light laved the red-brown hair, kissed a dimpled shoulder, and was lost; one hand clasped the falling cloak. Reverting to the head, madame was held spellbound by the eyes. Blue they were as Italian lakes, green like opals, brown as chestnuts, and sparkling with the vivacity of life. About the lips a smile played.

“It is life!” she whispered, after many moments. “It is life!”

Then she extended her hand to him, saying: “I am proud of my maestro.”

“You are the only one who has seen it,” he said, hoarsely, “and I swore that no one should.”

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She noticed how haggard and wan he was—how pitifully haggard and wan.

“Ah, but you will get over that, mon ami. We all feel it. It is a kind of parental love for the thing of our own creation. Now that you have finished, the reaction will set in. You will send it forth to the world, your bébé, to win the laurel crown.”

“No,” he said, sullenly.

Madame le Brun sharply drew in her breath and turned again to the canvas. The truth was dawning upon her. The personal note made the picture great, and she had overlooked it. Now she understood both it and him.

“I am glad it is over, mon ami,” she gently said. “You were making yourself ill.”

“It is not over,” he said, slowly; “never can be over.”

Madame traced patterns upon the floor with the tip of her dainty boot. He watched, in silence, wishing she would go.

“Shall I advise you?” she asked.

“Madame is most kind,” he formally replied, “but the heart is not the brain; the heart does not reason.”

“Men are proverbially selfish,” she said. “They cannot help themselves, so we will not argue that. I am going to put before you a view that does not occur to you. I suppose

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you will admit that you are killing yourself?"

He shrugged his shoulders hopelessly.

"Do you not admit?"

"It does not much matter," he replied. "My life is little enough to me, God knows!"

"I am coming to that. You were guilty of a common mistake. It will be common as long as men fail to understand how holy is a woman's virtue. That mistake wrecked both your lives, but more terrible than all else is your realization that it is a mistake. That canvas, mon ami, is a complete vindication of her. It breathes purity. You realize now, and remorse is eating out your heart. You care nothing for your life; you shrink at the prospect of facing the months and years that are to come. You think how miserable, how abject, you are, and turn coward. You think of yourself—are thinking yourself into the grave—but you never think of her, from her stand-point."

He threw back his head.

"Let me say it, mon ami, for both our sakes. A husband's respect is a woman's most priceless possession. With it she can face anything; without it she is lost. The tears come to my eyes when I think how black her world is; compared to hers, yours is a paradise. Innocent of all wrong-doing, she stands convicted of the worst.

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Ah, mon ami, she lives for but one thing; without it she would wither and die like a poor, bruised flower. ‘Some day, some day he will know; some day he will trust again. I must keep up till then.’ She lives for that alone.”

“And for what do I live?” he burst out. “We may never again see each other. The moment we were in communication they would be upon me to hang me. I am no coward, but, by your own argument, my death is to be avoided. There is no hope! Why should I care to live?”

“For her. Who dares to foresee the future? Princes and kings die, the public forgets. Wait and hope, as she is hoping, or, if you must throw your life away, do so that she may benefit. But there should be no question of death. Make the best of the present for the sake of the future. Be the man you were when you came to me. Rise out of yourself, for her sake.”

Quivering with emotion, madame pointed at the portrait.

“Mon Dieu!” she exclaimed. “Is she not worth it?”

Ashen, he turned towards the painting, and its eyes seemed to plead, the lips to tremble.

“If there was only some hope!” he murmured.

“There is always hope,” she solemnly responded, “for there is always *le bon Dieu*.”

## XXVI

BARRING the endeavors of a forward youth to presume upon mail-coach association, Lady Baxcombe made the journey to London without event; but when she found herself at the White Bear, in Piccadilly, the centre of a group of ill-mannered idlers, her heart sank. In her purse was nine pounds and eight-pence, no vast sum with which to maintain mind and body until the 1st of January. As she lingered in perplexity, the chamberlain of the inn inquired if he could be of service.

"Oh, if you will be so kind!" she exclaimed. "I—I want to find some place where I—that—where I may obtain a room cheaply."

She paused, confused by the attention the colloquy was attracting.

"Have you no friends in London, ma'am?"

Lady Baxcombe rightly judged that her acquaintances could be considered in no such light in aught save fair weather.

"No," she said, and something in the tone led the chamberlain to be less patronizing.

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"You come with me, missus," leered a dissipated fellow. "I can take you to a nice, genteel place where you'll have comfort no end."

"Move on," snarled the chamberlain—"quick, or I'll set the constables on you!"

"She might go down to Lem Lewis's. I dare say his missus 'ud bunk her for a bit," whispered one of the porters.

"Better go slow," suggested another. "'Ow do ye know who er w'at she is. She 'ain't got much luggage, hand she 'as got bloomin' foine stoile. Sink me, hif hi don't think she's ha saucy bit o' baggage, hi do!"

Low as was the undertone, the girl heard and said:

"How dare you? I am Lady—" but checked herself in time, for no good could come of the admission.

"Oho! So ye're my loidy, hare ye? My loidy wat?"

She flushed, as the crowd tittered.

"I am afraid I can't help you, my lady," said the chamberlain, taking his cue (one cannot pace the footway in front of a large hostlery year after year without becoming a physiognomist), "unless Lewis 'll take you on. Coates, go fetch Lewis; and you loafers get about your business and don't be blocking the way to your betters. None o' that, now!"

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I'll not take your impudence! Off with you! Oh, it's nothing, m' lud. I just stopped to take a word with my girl. Yes, m' lud, beautiful weather."

"Your pardon, my lady," the chamberlain explained, a moment later. "He's a bad un as wouldn't have understood."

"Thank you," she said, simply.

"Lewis 's in the scullery, my lady. He's a very proper man in his way, which, of course, isn't your ladyship's way, but still— Haven't you any professional gentlemen you could go to," he broke off, suddenly—"your solicitor, or your doctor, mayhap?"

"Yes," she said, quickly, for she had not thought of such a course; then arose the horror of more meetings and more explanations, "but—"

"Well, you can see Lewis first, anyway," said the chamberlain, delicately. "'Twon't do any harm."

At that moment Lewis appeared.

"This lady's looking for a home," explained the chamberlain, "where she'll be comfortable. We thought you could give her a room and victuals."

"Mebbe has 'ow she wouldn't be suited with the loikes o' us," said Lewis.

"Oh, I am sure I shall be!" she said, eagerly.

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"Hand mebbe the missus wouldn't be suited with the loikes o' 'er."

Lady Baxcombe said nothing, and a spasm of pain shot across Lewis's face, caused by a tap on the shin from the chamberlain's brass-shod staff.

"But hif she wants vor to troiy," the poor fellow stammered, "she can troiy."

So it was that Lady Baxcombe came into the humble family of Lewis, at a cost of twelve shillings a week for food and lodging. The view from her leaded panes comprised nothing but chimney-pots and smoke-begrimed rear walls, but that was preferable to being fed and browbeaten by some aged dowager to whom a companion was as tempting as was ever canary bird to household cat. Lady Baxcombe neglected to consider that any amount of badinage would be less detrimental to her than the company of her thoughts.

Fortunately her childhood surroundings had been upon a plane which contrasted not too severely with the new situation. Mrs. Lewis was motherly enough, and did the best she knew and could afford when she found that her lodger was not too critical. Quite the worst feature was the odor of cooking which arose from the neighboring back doors.

Aside from the small sum in her purse her

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ladyship possessed nothing save her clothes and her two rings, with which she could not part. It was imperative, then, that she should obtain employment, and there were but few things she could do. Her lack of bookish knowledge and of music precluded her from offering as a governess, while the idea of serving as a companion was odious. Despite her lack of learning, she used excellent English, because of home influence, and this gift she determined to employ; but a field preoccupied by Addison and Steele could proffer little to one who wrote awkwardly upon such topics as "Sorrow" and "The Bottomless Pit of Regret."

The publishers, although unattracted by her literary efforts, were impressed by her beauty and want, and through their influence her ladyship was offered an engagement at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, to play the maid in a revival of Mr. Sheridan's comedy "A Trip to Scarborough." The salary of one pound a week stifled all pangs of conscience remaining from her early training, and she accepted. Sheridan personally superintended the production, and, being a fine man when away from the Prince and his cronies, treated her with a consideration which showed his sympathy. She had to speak but the one inconsequential line—"If you please, madame, only to say whether you'll have

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me buy them or not"—and acquitted herself with credit on the opening night, despite the fact that her knees knocked together. Sir John Fitzwarren, in the stalls, said that he knew by the play-bill that "Amanda" was not the maid and the maid "Amanda."

Among the audience, a few nights later, was Sir Rodney Lynn. Being familiar with the action of the piece, he let his play-bill lie unnoticed until the entry of Amanda Loveless and her maid in the fourth act. The name given was "Miss Murray," but he could not be mistaken; and what could be more natural than that poverty had forced her ladyship to take to the theatre. Tearing a page from his engagement memoranda, he scribbled a note and gave it to an attendant. In a few moments the man returned.

"Miss Murray says will your honor please come back."

She awaited him, tremblingly. "I may be of spiritual service to you," his note had said, and that could only mean news of "him."

"Don't disappoint me," she said, wistfully. "I have waited so long."

"Where have you been hiding?" he asked.

"How was I to know?" she said, with a catch in her voice. "If I—I had known, I'd have been the second statue in Charing Cross."

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“Mrs. Reddington!” cried the call-boy, and a worn, painted woman moved past them to the stage.

“How is he?” cried her ladyship.

“Is well.”

Tears trickled down upon the maid’s apron.

“You will understand,” Sir Rodney gently said, “that we must not talk here. I will drive you to my aunt’s, in Kensington. You do not go on again, do you?”

“No,” she murmured.

“Then you can be ready in twenty minutes?”

“Oh, in half that number of seconds!”

“In that event,” he said, smiling, “I have barely time enough to fetch a coach.”

Snow was falling and the road lay mantled in white. A link-boy summoned a hackney-carriage, the wheels leaving tracks in the snow like strokes of a crayon.

“We must stop by my house,” said the baronet. “I have two letters from Donald.”

“Letters?” she exclaimed.

“Don’t be too elated; neither will give you much information.”

“Oh, anything will be welcome—the merest crumbs,” she said.

“I have been looking for you ever since my return from Bath. It was unkind to hide in that way.”

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"I had to live cheaply," she said, "and when my money gave out I had to work."

"Have you no friends? Why did you not come to me?"

"How could I? I could not accept money from you, and I did not wish you to know how poorly off I was."

"If you had come," he said, "you would not have been poorly off. Two months ago I received a draft from one 'Claude Dépetin' for one thousand francs."

"From Claude Dépetin—a thousand francs?"

"From Donald," he lied.

A sob escaped her.

"Poor little woman!—did you need it so much?"

"It's not that," she choked. "It's knowing that he thinks of me."

Her cheeks went from white to red and red to white.

"And you," she said, quickly, "what do you think?"

"I know you," he replied.

When they reached Kensington, Mrs. Mountrainor, Sir Rodney's aunt, was donning her nightcap, but the good soul threw open her heart and her door.

"I fear I am putting you to great inconvenience," said the girl.

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“Stuff and nonsense!” the old lady retorted. “I’ve heard about you often and am glad to have you. Mary, light the candles in the chamber next to mine, make the fire, get the warming-pan ready, and fetch up a little supper, with a cup of tea. Now, don’t object, my dear, because if you do you will fidget me, and when I am fidgeted I am cross. You are going to stop all night, certainly, and as much longer as I can persuade you to stay. My pet dog, Truffles, is wrapped up by the fire, and I’m not going to treat Truffles with more consideration than I do you, although that is not my rule; usually I treat Truffles better than I do my friends.”

“Lady Baxcombe has some letters, aunt. She tried to read them in the coach.”

“Oh!” interposed her ladyship.

“Letters? Oh, letters!” said Mrs. Mountainor, her dear face radiant with intuition. “Then, nephew, back to your draughty coach and leave her to her letters and me. Don’t thank me, my dear; thanks are always embarrassing. Gratitude does very well where it belongs, and that is in the heart.”

“May they bring you sweet dreams!” said Sir Rodney to her ladyship.

“Oh, thank you, thank you so much! You are all so good,” she faltered.

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“Stuff!” said Mrs. Mountrainor. “Nephew, I dare say your coachman is freezing. Good-night.”

When he had gone, and Lady Baxcombe had been shown to her room, the old lady said, earnestly:

“I do hope your letters will give you joy, my dear. I was once a girl and I know how you feel, but all will come right in the end. In my time—a long time it’s been, too—I’ve found that a pretty safe belief. Now, good-night, dear; sleep well, and ring when you want your chocolate.”

When her ladyship turned to the letters, postmarked “Paris,” her eyes grew misty, for a vast joy was surging within her. They could tell her nothing sweeter than she already knew, that her beloved husband was thinking of her; mayhap was longing for her as she was longing for him.

## XXVII

**S**HORTLY before eight the baronet approached the Tuileries.

At the end of the facade a mass of stones, mortar, and rafters broke the sky-line, the work of a bomb intended for Napoleon, but which spent its fury, instead, upon the labyrinth of houses between the Tuileries and the Louvre. Remnants of the placards of the Revolution were still clinging to the walls. The ink had scarce faded. "Citoyens," shrieked one of these, "royalty has been abolished in France, never to return! Our country belongs to us, by gift of God!" Yet within the shadow of such rested the man whose one passion was lust of conquest and whose one goal was empiric sway.

"Bonsoir, m'sieur," said a crisp voice. "Pardon for keeping you."

"You are worth waiting for," he said.

"I suppose I must say au revoir?" whispered her companion, whose blouse proclaimed the artisan.

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"Tiens!" laughed mademoiselle. "Unless m'sieur invites you."

"I shall be most happy," said the baronet, but the young fellow smiled.

"Non, non. M'sieur is most kind, but I prefer my filet de cheval to the best bœuf aux champignons," he said. "Then au revoir, Margaret."

"Au revoir," she lightly returned, and the young fellow left them. "He did not annoy you, m'sieur?"

"My dear, I am a man of the world."

"He is very persistent."

"Would you have him otherwise?"

"Yes and no. He is well enough, and thinks a great deal of me."

"He should, and yet—"

"Yet he parted with me? Tiens, que voulez-vous? We are good friends; yes, too good friends to mar each other's pleasure."

"It is the French way," he mused.

"A good way," she challenged; "better than your English way. It gives the poor girl a chance."

"She has always the chance. No woman is poor with features such as yours, ma petite, and a heart so kind."

"Je vous remercie, m'sieur," she simpered.

"Is that your coach?"

It was, and they drove to the Café Lombardy,

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then rising from the wreckage of the Reign of Terror. There was nothing in Mademoiselle Margaret's simple yet fetching dress to distinguish her from the *beau monde*. Her heart fluttered when a liveried attendant, bowing low, led the way to the *loge* secured by the baronet. When the flunky had gone, mademoiselle sank upon the divan and gazed at the table, bowered with roses. In the palm-garden, below, the Hungarian orchestra was playing a native air.

"You must be very wealthy, monseigneur."

"Quite the contrary," he said, amused.

"Why, then," she burst out, "do you spend so much on me?"

"You are pretty and charming. Why should I not?"

"You are poking fun. The sun is charming, but it lasts how long?"

"Long enough to warm our hearts," he smirked.

"Do you know," she said, the roses in her cheeks deepening under Sauterne and Chamberlin, "I have often thought of going to England, but I am afraid."

"We are not such boors."

"Ah, it is not your countrymen, but your country—so bleak and dreary, is it not? All roast beef and beer and foxes?"

"Not quite all."

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"But most of it. I know, because there is a student in the Beaux-Arts who has lived in England. Many of them have, as émigrés, but this one seems to have fallen in love with England."

The baronet sipped his burgundy.

"It is not often, Margaret, that we have prospect of such an acquisition."

"I would go, but I am afraid," she repeated. "One earns nothing here, and the artists are merciless. They become absorbed and forget the poor model. Sometimes I am ready to drop. It is not good for the figure, so much fatigue; one becomes scrawny from that."

He slipped his arm about her waist, and there was no protest, for that was part of the supper.

"Monsieur Dépetin said I could do better in England."

"Who is Monsieur Dépetin?"

"The student I am talking about. He is very English in his ways."

"Ah!" murmured Sir Collyn, relaxing the arm about her waist. "How do you mean?"

"How can I tell you? He is to the manner born. Voilà! Oui, and to the grand manner born."

"Pray describe him, this Monsieur Dépetin. A faint recollection—Monsieur Dépetin, the name is very familiar."

The while she obeyed his eyes grew hard and

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glinted coldly. It was possible, only that. Little more was developed save that Dépetin, although no longer a member of the school, was accustomed to haunt the building for an hour or so of each day.

"I have enjoyed myself so much, monseigneur," said the girl, when they stood again in the Rue Chauroy.

"I am happy," he said, perplexed, taking her hand in his; then he slipped hers under his arm.

"Non," she murmured, "we part here. The road divides, you to your bed of feathers and I to my couch of straw. Au revoir, monseigneur."

Nodding, she withdrew her hand and flitted from him. For a moment he stared after her, and then, with an oath, swung upon his heel. The Hôtel Savoie, where he was staying, was near the Lombardy, and while he walked he conned the mysterious Dépetin. It was possible, and he would not allow the opportunity to languish; revenge was too sweet. About one in the afternoon Monsieur Dépetin visited the École des Beaux-Arts; at that hour the baronet would seek out the Rue Zacharie. If his suspicions were verified, it was but a moment to the Hôtel de Ville.

Célestine was putting things to order the next afternoon, when the rumble of a fiacre

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caused her to drop her brush and basin and scurry to the window.

"I am in search of Monsieur Dépetin," said the baronet, with a courtly bow. "Mayhap mademoiselle can inform me."

Célestine stammered that the gentleman lived there, but was not at home.

"That is bad, since we are old friends and I have but a few hours in Paris."

His regret was so apparent that her heart ached for him.

"And do you know when he is expected, mademoiselle?"

"M'sieur usually returns about two, monseigneur, but of late he is often out until evening."

"Dear ! dear!" murmured the baronet, while Célestine sighed.

"Mayhap," he said, "mayhap—but no, I will not trouble mademoiselle."

"Oh, it will be a pleasure, monseigneur," the girl said, quickly. "What is it I can do?"

"I was thinking that I might go up to his room, we are such old friends, and write him a parting note, if mademoiselle—"

"Oui, certainement," she cried. "Please to come in."

After a curt "attendez-moi" to the driver of the fiacre, the baronet followed the girl.

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"This is m'sieur's chamber," said Célestine. "I was straightening it, but I can as well wait."

"I pray you not," he said. "It will be a pleasure to have you stay, and you can tell me of mon cher Claude, for whom my heart is longing. So this is where he slaves for his art? Ah, if he were only here to greet me! Does he work very hard now, mademoiselle?"

He was taking a rapid inventory of the apartment.

"So hard, monseigneur! It is a pity. His poor cheeks are hollow and his eyes are as big as moons and shiny like stars. They say"—the voice trembled—"that m'sieur is killing himself."

"It is, indeed, a pity."

Noticing the draped portrait, he strode towards it, but the girl was before him.

"Non, non, monseigneur!" she cried. "No one sees that. Not even I have seen. It is that which is killing him. I—I think, monseigneur, it—it is a woman."

"But we are such old friends," said the baronet, striving to conceal his exultation.

"Non," the girl gasped; "you must not. It is the wish of m'sieur."

Sir Collyn desisted and began to write. After a moment he inquired of her if she would be so good as to fetch a glass of water.

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“Oui, monseigneur,” she unsuspectingly replied.

No sooner had her footsteps died away than the baronet, flinging back the covering of the picture, gazed into the blue eyes of Lady Baxcombe. His breath came quickly and hard, his hands trembled, and a cruel smile played about his lips. Gradually the expression of hate changed to one of fierce exultation. Here lay the road to the heart; here was the rack upon which his enemy should lie. When Célestine returned the baronet was writing.

“Merci, mademoiselle,” he said, and drank the water. With steady fingers the letter was sealed and given into her care, with a golden *louis* for her trouble.

“It is too bad that m’sieur is not at home, monseigneur,” she murmured.

“I regret it more than I can express, mademoiselle. Bonsoir.”

“Bonsoir, monseigneur,” said the girl, thinking what a splendid thing it must be to live luxuriously and have *louis* at one’s command.

When the fiacre had turned the corner its occupant countermanded his first direction, in a voice vibrant with passion.

“Mendez-moi à l’Hôtel de Ville,” he said, “la Préfecture de Police!”

## XXVIII

THE baronet and Monsieur Jacques Laurent, agent de police, from the window of the Brasserie Montignol, saw Dépetin turn into the Rue Zacharie.

“It would be well,” suggested Monsieur Laurent, “if monseigneur would give me some hint of the nature of the business we are undertaking. I should know better how to act.”

“If you are called upon to act,” said Sir Collyn, “you need only take the man into custody.”

“It is seldom,” went on Monsieur Laurent, “that we act in another’s behalf without precise information. Only monseigneur’s standing procured my services. Of course, if there is a reward—”

“You shall hear of it in due time.”

So the agent lapsed into that French silence which is eloquent of itself. The change of expression on the baronet’s face as he caught sight of the quarry did not escape Monsieur Laurent, and confirmed his suspicion of irregularity. To

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him the case savored of spite, but when the baronet signed to him to follow, he did so with Christian meekness.

“ You will wait here while I go in,” Sir Collyn commanded, in tones which betrayed his excitement. “ If I do not return within half an hour, you will come after me.”

Monsieur Laurent nodded, and the baronet crept up the stairs upon the heels of his countryman. As soon as Baxcombe’s fingers released the door-knob on the inside, the pursuer’s closed upon it on the out.

Upon the table, under the candlestick, Célestine had placed Temple’s letter, and the Honorable Donald, still with his back to the door, broke the seal hungrily. Starting and paling, he read:

“ By the time these lines greet you every avenue of escape save one will have been cut off. That one I will explain in person. You were a fool to trifle with me, but, having trifled, you must pay the piper.”  
TEMPLE.”

The paper fluttered to the floor. It was over, then. Their reunion would be the other side of the grave. With the knowledge came a blessed calm, the first he had known since his flight. Death can hold no terror for a man whose every hour has been one of torture. There was only

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a vast regret that things were as they were instead of as they might have been; that his life had brought joy to none; that he could leave no better matter for epitaph than cruel injustice to the woman who had been his all.

With steady hands he threw back the curtain covering the canvas. The flannel brushed the violets from their resting place, and he tenderly replaced them. Straight into her eyes he gazed. The blood crept to his forehead and anguish gnawed at his heart. If she could step from the cold stretch of canvas into the warmth of his bosom, that she might know neither had lived in vain! If only those eyes could see, those ears could hear, the love he longed to confess! For but a single moment into which to compress the past and all eternity! It seemed that he had only to stretch forth his hand to clasp the warm flesh of hers.

“Speak to me!” he cried, as one cries to a corpse.

The rafters echoed the wail.

The curtain fell to the tinkling of the brass rings upon which it was accordioned, and no casket was ever so heart-rendingly closed. With a groan he turned to the chest of drawers, while the baronet watched, sardonically. Against the crimson lining of the case which Baxcombe took from the top drawer lay a duelling-pistol, load-

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ed and primed. He examined the priming, and, turning to lay the weapon upon the table, caught sight of the baronet lounging against the door but ready for instant intercession. The blood ebbed from the Honorable Donald's face as he raised the barrel until it covered Temple's vitals. In that position the two took inventory of each other.

"It seems," said Baxcombe, at last, "that the advantage is still with me."

"There is an agent de police across the street," said the baronet.

"He could scarce arrive in time."

"Bah!" said the baronet, stepping to the window. "You are not of that type. An Italian ruffiano might; you—never!"

Then, wheeling, he struck Baxcombe's arm a blow that sent the weapon spinning along the floor.

"You might, however, pistol yourself," he explained, "and so spoil my plans. I advise you to let the thing lie, else I shall be forced to split the carafe over your head."

"The terms of the reward are 'dead or alive,'" said Baxcombe.

"Ah! but death is nothing to you. I want you to live and suffer. That picture, which I saw this noon, discovered my method to me."

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Beyond gripping the top of the chair against which he was leaning, Baxcombe gave no sign.

"I can realize what that picture means to you. I believe that the Buddhists would part with their Buddha with less reluctance than you with that. So I have decided that you must part with it."

"You are wasting time," said Baxcombe.

"You shall give it to me and I will exhibit it, with its history exploited. Then I shall present it to the most disreputable association that I am able to discover. One moment. Remember that if you attempt violence the game is up. I shall get the picture at the sale and you will hang for your pains."

"You are interesting. I presume that you are drunk."

"There is one condition, a very generous one, considering that I risk everything for sentiment. Some time ago Captain Trevelyan visited you in my behalf. You treated him very cavalierly, despite his reason for calling. That is a score which can only be wiped out with pistols. I have my arm with me. The place shall be this room; the time, the present. I need hardly point out that the condition is entirely favorable to you, since you may kill me, while I shall be at the greatest pains to spare you. It is the privilege of meeting you upon which I insist. The

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noise will bring the constable up here. If I am killed, you acted in self-defence. He has no idea, as yet, as to your identity."

There was a knock at the door, and Madame and Mademoiselle le Brun entered, clad in coaching toilettes.

"Are we de trop?" inquired madame.

"You are never that," Baxcombe responded, and, motioning to Temple, added: "This gentleman is the representative of a firm of solicitors. We have been at work."

"How provoking!" and mademoiselle's features echoed her mother's disappointment. "We hoped to take you with us into the country. Fresh air is a panacea for cheeks such as yours. Is it really impossible? We can return in an hour."

"Alas! I fear I shall be kept thrice that time. Is there any chance of finishing before four, Stratton?"

"I fear not, your honor," said the baronet, promptly, this being within his cult.

"At least, you will come to-night, mon ami, to my little affair?"

"With the utmost pleasure."

"Then I shall expect you. Au revoir. No, you need not trouble, thank you; the footman is here. Au revoir."

"Au revoir," murmured mademoiselle.

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He kissed the tips of their fingers, lingering longer than was his wont, and then came to lean, again, against the chair.

"That was very cleverly played," observed the baronet. "Have you your answer ready?"

"Be so good as to wait until the ladies have quitted the house," he said, his face stern, his lips drawn. Sir Collyn took a pistol-case from his pocket and placed the weapon upon the table. At the foot of the stairs madame and mademoiselle passed Monsieur Laurent, bound up.

"Your answer?" demanded the baronet again.

Baxcombe hurled the oaken chair straight at the portrait. There was a ripping of canvas and a crash as the chair rebounded to the floor and split asunder.

"You may go to the devil!" he said.

With an oath the baronet threw the flannel curtain to one side. The painting hung in ribbons. In the doorway stood Monsieur Jacques Laurent.

"Arrest that man!" cried Sir Collyn, pointing to Baxcombe. "He's wanted in England for the attack on Prince George!"

## XXIX

THE news of the capture reached England by the French despatch sloop *D'Alençon*, the Vicomte d'Espara commanding. This gentleman, through the French ambassador, was presented to the new premier, Mr. Addington, and by him to his Majesty. The King expressed pleasure at meeting so able an officer as the vicomte, and D'Espara gave polite expression to the felicitations of France.

Two days later the sloop-of-war *Marlborough*, under order of the ministry, set sail from Portsmouth for Calais, there to receive the prisoner.

Having received the royal thanks, as well as a signet-ring from the Queen, the vicomte was entertained at Carlton House, and left it disgusted, as must have been any man of decent feeling. So ineradicable was D'Espara's bad impression that he gave it vent, in later years, in his *Londres et les Provinces d'Angleterre, d'Écosse et d'Irlande*, on page 213 of which he says:

“During my stay in London, in connection with the notorious Baxcombe affair, I was entertained at

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Carlton House by Prince George, now Prince Regent. Living in an age of reverence for royalty, we are apt to gloss over their frailties, but the most abject sycophant could not have been blind to the degradation to which this Prince was devoted. I am no prude, but I stood appalled at the viciousness which flourished about him, nor was I gratified to find myself the centre of a horde of Italian, Spanish, English, and Portuguese favorites, sharpers, roués, and blackguards. It is inconceivable how a man of his charm, attainments, and advantages can delight in an atmosphere which must pollute the nostrils of every honest-minded gentleman."

Whatever was the gratification of Prince George and the Queen, whose idol he was, the English people were not overjoyed at the capture of an Englishman who, if the worst were true, had only resented an attempt at the destruction of his family. The case was one that directly appealed to dozens of parents and husbands, hundreds of sisters and brothers, and so on throughout the ramifications of blood relationship. Allied with these was a class of society, daily growing more circumspect, not blind to the basic law of morality. To these, in turn, were united numbers of tradesmen and money-lenders, together with their kindred and friends, who had suffered by the Prince's criminal extravagance. Then countless ladies of fashion, and no fashion, had

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enlisted their sympathies in behalf of the Princess Caroline, neglected and abused by the man upon whom she should have been privileged to rely for protection and support. Besides this host must be considered the political antagonists in the houses of Lords and Commons, who banqueted upon every crumb of scandal, as well as the personal enemies, who were legion, of the irascible Queen.

The situation in England was similar to that which in France produced the Revolution. The vice and extravagance at Carlton House, the extent of the government civil list, aggregating hundreds of thousands of pounds, the vast sums spent in prosecuting the wars with the colonies and with France, necessitated taxing the people to the last farthing. In Ireland the opposition had culminated in the insurrection of '98, but throughout the rest of the kingdom the people contented themselves with petitions and clamor. Patriotism was strong in their humble breasts, but so was discrimination, and, although sober thought restrained them from violence, there was no love lost 'twixt people and court.

At the time of the arrival of the *D'Alençon*, Lady Baxcombe was at Kensington, the kindness of old Mrs. Mountrainor having completely subdued her ladyship's disinclination to act as a

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companion. The news of her husband's capture threw her into hysterics, which gave place to a constant terror and a secret joy at having found him, of which, in view of his dire peril, she was ashamed. Mrs. Mountrainor, not less distressed but more composed, implored Sir Rodney to suggest means of rescue. The baronet, who had formed an honorable and secret passion for her ladyship, was anxious to be of service, but was put to it to see paths by which anything could be accomplished. Lady Baxcombe's friends of other days had shown a desire to be well rid of her. Georgiana, lovely Duchess of Devonshire, had been appealed to and had expressed herself as horrified at thought of peace-making in such a cause, while the Duke had bluntly affirmed that a man who raised his hand against a member of the royal family was far too low to be worthy of sympathy.

"There is Mr. Pitt," said Mrs. Mountrainor. "My husband knew him well."

"Pitt is out of the ministry and has been at daggers drawn with the Prince ever since the Fitzherbert affair, in the year one. The Queen hates him and the King never liked him," said Sir Rodney.

"Mayhap, but a man can't be the head of the cabinet without influence," said his aunt.

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"If Mr. Pitt can't help us he can direct us elsewhere."

"I think Mr. Baxcombe knew him slightly," said her ladyship.

"There," said Mrs. Mountrainor. "We will at least try, m' dear. Rodney, pull the bell."

The baronet complied, the carriage was ordered, and the two ladies sped towards Bowling Green House, Putney, where the statesman resided. Mrs. Mountrainor outlined the plan of campaign.

"It is best, my dear, that you go in alone. There is nothing indecent about it. I shall be at the door, and Pitt is known to be exemplary where women are concerned."

"Please, Mrs. Mountrainor, won't you come?"

"Not a step," said the old lady, decisively. "I haven't lived my years for nothing, and I know the value of a pretty face, no matter how prudish a man may be. He will respond to you, while if I were along he would shut up like a clam. Of course, use my name, but, whatever you do, don't weep. He hates tears like the plague."

"But if—if he can't help me?"

"Then we have other arrows to our bow, m' dear, and, depend on 't, one of them will fetch what we are after."

The ex-minister received her ladyship with

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grave courtesy and listened without much show of interest.

“You see, madame,” he said, when she had concluded, “the trouble is that you are unable to advance any other claim to clemency than that based upon humanitarian principles. The crime of high-treason is the most heinous known to the law. If your husband had rendered signal service to the state, or if he had contributed in marked degree to the fields of art or literature, you might ask intercession on the ground that his loss would be a national deprivation. But you are prepared to advance only that he is dear to you, an excuse which would be common to the wives of all offenders, of every grade of iniquity.”

“But he is an artist, Mr. Pitt, and his family is a most noble one.”

“That very fact is an aggravation. The closer to the throne, the greater the treachery. Remember, I beg, that I am taking a strictly impersonal view. The sacredness of the royal family, under any and all conditions, must be most strenuously impressed upon the public mind. The only situation where clemency could be considered would arise, as I have said, from national gratitude, and then the issue would remain precarious. I know of no case where pardon has been extended under circumstances such as these.”

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Noting the pallor of the lovely face, he spoke more sympathetically.

"At any rate, my dear young lady, you address yourself to the wrong person. I am out of public life, but were I still in it, were I a thousand times prime-minister, I could not serve you. The members of the cabinet are creatures of reason: you cannot bring reason to bear, so you must appeal to the heart of his Royal Highness. That is the only plan I am able to suggest."

"You can do nothing?" she sobbed.

"Less than nothing. I am sorry, madame."

"Surely he has been punished enough, sir," she faltered. "We all have suffered so!"

"Mayhap the Prince will consider that," he said, kindly. "If he does, you will have accomplished much."

"But not all?" she queried, piteously.

"Not quite all, madame. It is a state crime. In striking his Highness, your husband aimed a blow at the state. That must be remembered, in theory; in practice, the wishes of the Prince would probably prevail, provided the Queen was persuaded to overlook the attack upon her favorite son."

"But the King, sir, is not so biased. May I not place hope in him?"

"There is no king, madame: there is only a queen."

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“Then you think that my only hope lies in an appeal to—to Prince George?” she asked, with glowing eyes. Before that proud gaze Pitt hesitated, knowing its import.

“Her Majesty is, after all, a woman,” he said. “You are a woman. It is barely possible.”

“Oh, if she has a heart!—” burst out her ladyship.

“No one has accused her of such a thing,” he said; “yet she may have, and yours is a forlorn hope. You might try.”

“Oh, I will,” she sobbed. “I will. She is a wife and mother; she cannot be soulless. Please tell me how to reach her presence. I am sure she will help me when she knows. Oh, Mr. Pitt, she must!”

“Her Majesty and I are not on the best of terms. I will see what I can do and let you know.”

She restrained the tears, and, extending her hands, essayed to speak, but could not, and so smiled through the mist.

“It is little enough, madame, in a cause so vital to you both,” he gently observed.

“So vital!” she choked.

“I will let you know,” he said, “to-morrow. In the meanwhile remember that success depends upon you. Do not give way. I have met Mr. Baxcombe, and he impressed me as being a

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young gentleman of exceptional parts. If your devotion conserves him to the state, I shall rejoice with you."

"It will come," said the baronet that night, in the privacy of his aunt's chamber, "to an appeal to the Prince, and she will find her cause damaged, instead of aided, by having first seen the Queen."

"And that will mean," snapped the old lady, "the last shreds of her reputation scattered to the four points of the compass."

"I'll call out the first man who hints it," said Lynn.

"Don't talk nonsense. All the affairs in Christendom couldn't mend matters. You can't cure the plague by introducing typhus."

On the following day one of Pitt's servants presented himself in Kensington with a letter and enclosure from his master. The letter ran:

"MY DEAR MADAME,—Through the Duke of C., your request for an audience was communicated to her Majesty. I regret to be obliged to inform you that the Queen does not see fit to comply with your wish, and her Majesty's chamberlain, through his grace, has requested me to forward the enclosure. I am, my dear madame, greatly pained at this utter failure of my best intentions, and, again advising you to convey your prayers direct to his Royal Highness, I remain your ladyship's

"Obedient servant, WILLIAM Pitt.

"BOWLING GREEN HOUSE, PUTNEY."

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The enclosure read:

“MADAME,—The Queen commands me to convey to you that your request for an audience, since it must spring from a desire to appeal to her Majesty in behalf of your husband, than which no subject could be more repugnant to her Majesty, is denied.

“The Queen further bids me say that, in the future, all communications anent the matter had best be addressed, through the official channels, to his Majesty, the King.

“I am, madame, very respectfully,

“HARCOURT,

“Ld. Chamberlain to her Majesty the Queen.

“ST. JAMES’S PALACE.”

Meanwhile the sloop - of - war *Marlborough*, with Mr. Baxcombe aboard, was luffing up the Thames towards the Tower wharf. About her, like wasps, clung a fleet of row-boats containing the curious. Shortly after the *Marlborough* came to anchor, a long-boat pulled from the starboard side and headed for the landing at St. Thomas’s Tower. When Lady Baxcombe was reading the lord chamberlain’s communication her husband was passing through the Bloody Gate, perhaps never to emerge in life. It had been her ladyship’s wish to be present when Mr. Baxcombe landed, but the government had refused.

Although but the one hope remained, she denied herself contemplation of it. It was too

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horrible to contemplate, and there was so little need of contemplation. When the time came she would be ready. There was nothing she possessed that she would not give freely, gladly, but the thought of what might be demanded terrified her.

### XXX

THE news that the King refused to interfere was so fully expected that her ladyship was not further depressed, and application was made at Carlton House for audience with the Prince.

The failure of their efforts greatly disheartened Mrs. Mountrainor and Lynn. The old lady was not inclined to put faith in a prince who had escaped criminal arraignment on several occasions solely because of his rank. Nevertheless, it was the last resort, and when his Highness responded that he would see Lady Baxcombe at half-past four on the afternoon of the following day, Mrs. Mountrainor was the first to proclaim confidence in the outcome. The baronet was less successful in masking his feelings, and in the presence of his aunt burst into passionate indignation.

"Yes, I know it's bad enough," she said. "Everything is bad enough, but what else can she do? Anyway, there is no sense in unstringing our nerves until it happens. After all, it may not happen."

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"Bah! With that man—that ruffian?"

"I have learned that it is from just such men that one may occasionally expect a worthy deed," said the old lady, with trembling lips that gave the lie to her calm. "The good folks go along placidly and the bad ones are sometimes jolted into goodness."

"Look at the man's record, ma'am. Where is there a ray? Take it from the cradle. It's the disgust of the nation, a chapter of crime from common fraud to the Lexley girls, the other day."

"I dare say the Lexley girls—"

"Simple, modest, country ladies, ma'am, incapable of an impure thought."

"Stuff!" snapped his aunt. "Forget-me-nots and weeds grow side by side in the country. Don't tell me, Rodney. 'Twill be time enough to hector when the thing has been done. Meanwhile, I'm not going to spoil my sleep. If the poor dear is willing to face it, her husband can have no fault to find. If he had had half the confidence in her that she deserves, they'd both be in Hanover Square this minute; and let me tell you, sir, that if you are going to tear around you had better take yourself off. We've enough to bear. Compose yourself, sir. Look at me!"

And she fought back the tears, stilled the

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quivering lips, that the baronet might take example.

The woman who alighted from the Mountainor coach at Carlton House the next afternoon was but a shadow of the Lady Baxcombe who had travelled there to the memorable levee. The eyes no longer sparkled; their color no longer changed from violet to green and from green to chestnut; instead they were a faded blue; the circles under the eyes augmented the pallor of the cheeks; the lips, instead of being red and presumptuous, were thin and pale. McMahon met her, the same McMahon who afterwards figured as Sir John, in recognition of his "services to the crown," and conducted her to a drawing-room on the second floor, where, after telling her that the Prince would shortly be with her, he left her.

When George entered, from the cabinet, she turned towards him. He approached with that grace and impression of regality which was natural to him, and, checking her courtesy, led her to a divan.

"Is it possible, madame," he said, coldly, "that you see fit to renew our acquaintance?"

"It is of that I wish to speak," she said.

"You repent, madame?"

"I have come to beseech you to do me justice," she said, rapidly. "You don't know how hard

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it was to come. I—I don't know how to say what I wish to say. I don't know how to tell you how terrible it all has been. I know what you think, but you can't imagine how I feel. You told me that day that people maligned you. You told me how you loved Mrs. Fitzherbert, and how you suffered—don't you remember?—when she was taken from you. I know you are a good man at heart—”

“Madame,” the Prince interposed, “if it is intercession you seek, you must look to the King.”

“The King refuses,” she choked. “There is only you.”

“The knave? Pray, what claim have you upon me? Am I, indeed, to turn the Scriptural cheek?”

“But why—why are these things so?” she demanded, passionately, quivering in every muscle. “Why did I tell you to go? Because I had to protect my good name and his honor. When he came in, I was in your arms; how could he know I had no wish to be there?”

“And you are sure you had none?”

Beyond the blazing eyes and heaving bosom she gave no sign.

“He did only what his manhood forced him to do. Had he not resented it, I would have hated, loathed him. There are times when all rank is levelled. That was such a time.”

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"It seems to me, madame, that quite enough has been made of the occurrence. At least, I am weary of it."

"You are weary of it!" she retorted, with such scorn that the Prince winced. "You! And what of us—what of me? There has not been an hour since then that has not maddened me, and you tell me you are weary. What signifies it, if you are? You prepared this life, this misery!"

"Madame," said George, and into his voice there crept a metallic ring, "either you are purposeless or your purpose is to beg my assistance. If the former, there is no need to talk further; if the latter, you had best moderate your tone. This is not the place, nor are you the person, to indulge in recrimination."

Under his gaze her eyes fell and she faltered.

"You tell me that I am a good man, at heart," he went on. "I am neither good nor bad, but no one would damn me, I am very sure, if I refused to listen to you, and," he added, *sotto voce*, "it would not signify if they did."

"But is that your highest ambition—not to be damned?" she said, softly. "Don't you care to be sanctified? Don't you think your people would love you for being merciful? Don't you believe that one woman would pray for and bless you, from her heart of hearts?"

"And if I allow the law of the land to take its

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course, that woman will curse me from her heart of hearts?"

"No," she gently replied. "There would be no heart. It would shrivel up and die."

The Prince smiled.

"And what of my duty to the state?" he said. "Laws are not made for the individual."

"Are they not?" she flashed. "A ruler's duty to the state is to induct his people by example. As he is, so will they be; if he is brave, they will be brave, and there is no higher courage than that which rights a wrong. Nothing is more noble than the nobility of being just. That is all I ask of you. If it is a favor, your conscience profits by it."

"Ah," he mused, "but there you cross the Rubicon. I am not a charitable person, madame; instead, I am most practical. I judge you love your husband?"

"I love him better than anything, everything," she proudly declared.

His Highness arose and paced the floor, while she watched, not daring to move.

"Do you know the extent of the aid I can render you?" he suddenly asked.

"Only," she said, "that your wishes would have weight with the ministry and the King."

"How do you know that? Did my wishes have weight before?"

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“Before?”

“Yes,” he said, brutally, “with you.”

She quivered as under a blow.

“Instead, you ordered me from the house, praise God! Well, suppose I retaliate in kind—suppose I tell you to go.”

Halting, he pointed to the door, a nasty smile curling his lip. The eyes she raised to his were doglike in their pathos and entreaty.

“What the devil do I care for you or him? He is a blind fool and you are a faded, washed-out woman. What signifies it to me if he hangs? Why should I interfere to save him? There is but one reason.”

“You will?” she cried, piteously.

For a moment he stood looking at her, and then pulled the bell-rope. Her ladyship watched with her soul in her eyes and crimson spots in her cheeks.

“In the East Room,” he was saying to McMahon, who had answered the bell, “in the drawer of the escritoire, you will find two documents. Be so good as to fetch them.”

When the man had gone, the Prince turned to her and said, quietly: “A little forethought, madame, is an excellent thing. A little compliance on that one occasion would have spared you suffering. In order to teach you that lesson, I prepared the papers Mr. McMahon is fetching,

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as soon as your request for audience came to hand."

"You—you knew, then, all the while, that you—" she faltered.

"I knew all the while, madame. My intercession is at your command."

The color faded from her face, her lips tightened, and her lithe figure was drawn to its fullest height. Her finger-nails were cutting into her palms, but she gave no sign of the torment in her heart. It was for him.

McMahon, entering, handed the papers to the Prince.

"You may proceed as I arranged," said his Highness.

The catching of the door behind McMahon was a knell, but Lady Baxcombe did not flinch.

"This, madame," said the Prince, slowly, "is my recommendation that the prosecution of Mr. Baxcombe be dropped, and this is a note to the Lord Lieutenant of the Tower requesting him to allow Lady Baxcombe access to her husband while he remains in the fortress. I will place them here, upon the table, madame."

Then, stepping to the door on the left, he threw back the crimson curtain. Across the threshold lay the royal retiring-room.

"Après vous, madame."

The pathos in her eyes found no answering

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light in his, and as she realized that the moment had at last come her veins ran cold with the horror of it.

“I may trust you?” she asked, faintly.

“As a little child would,” he replied, leering upon her. She stepped forward by sheer will, and a deathly faintness forced her to seize a chair-back for support.

“So frail!” he said, in mock solicitude, and crossed rapidly to the table.

“Ah, no!” she cried as he snatched the papers. “I—I am going with you.”

His scornful, triumphant eyes swept from the crown of her head to the tips of her boots.

“A pitiable shape of woman!” he quietly said.

Then his face blazed in anger, against her, against himself, and, casting the papers at her feet, he pointed commandingly towards the door.

“Begone!” he said, harshly. “What in God’s name could man want with such as you!”

## XXXII

STRANGELY enough, the recommendation bore no covertly despatched letter of explanation and disavowal, but the expression of the princely wish was attended by unforeseen consequences. The members of the cabinet and a large quota from the House of Lords were not disposed to allow the matter to pass in any such manner. A storm portended, and the arguments, since they were based upon the inviolability of the royal family, were not to be easily explained away.

It was pointed out to his Highness that at a time when it was imperative for him to receive a large grant of money from Parliament the worst thing possible would be to stir up dissension, but George possessed the Hanoverian stubbornness.

Into the argument, at the time when debate was wroth, appeared the angry Queen, who spoke her mind with little regard for the feelings of others and less for the English language. The members of Parliament were losing sight of the main issue and embracing Whig and Tory an-

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imosity in a way that threatened a political loggerhead. The arguments were given space in the *Post* and *Chronicle*, and thence reprinted in *The Gentleman's Magazine* until that publication was flooded with passionate letters. The coffee-houses were full of the case, and it penetrated to the extremities of the empire, finding a host of friends in disaffected Ireland.

Lady Baxcombe, suffering from nervous prostration, was under the care of Sir John Pringle, who told her that the nerve-waste had too long continued to speedily yield to treatment, and the best she could expect was a rest of three weeks in her chamber.

Meanwhile the Princess Caroline was residing at Blackheath, whither his Majesty often journeyed to escape the harassments of his domestic affairs. Weak though he was, he possessed the redeeming trait of great parental love. The profligacy of the Prince had been a source of pitiable distress to the poor man, who would have been at his best at the head of an humble family, and, particularly, had he been saddened at his son's attitude towards Caroline. The King and Princess had grown to be fast friends through their common bond of misery, and at Blackheath, for the first and last time in her life, Caroline gave advice, that was followed, in the affairs of the kingdom over which she was destined to

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be Queen, but never to rule. The King had refused to interfere in Baxcombe's behalf at the dictation of his indomitable consort. The Princess, with deep sympathy, laid all the circumstances before his Majesty, and with great tact made the most of the improbable theory that the Prince had been actuated by generosity bred of remorse. As his Majesty listened, his face softened. Time and time again had been wrung from him, "This is more than a father can bear," but here was an indication that the boy was not wholly bad. With a father's hope, the King nourished the possibility of atonement, and this was a step in the right direction. If a sense of moral responsibility was dawning upon his son, what man could say whither it might lead him?

"You are positive that there was no ulterior motive?" faltered the King. "It is difficult to reconcile this high-mindedness with what has gone before."

"There has been no hint of it, Sire," returned the Princess.

"Then," said his Majesty, with more determination than he had evinced in months, "it shall be as he wishes. My son shall never lack my support in redemption of his name."

The next day Addington was commanded to discontinue proceedings against Baxcombe, whose immediate release was ordered, and to

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present Parliament with a bill to remove the attainder. When the news reached the Queen her Majesty refused to credit it, and, when assured of its verity, burst into a passion, but to no avail. The fiat had gone forth and the gates of the Tower were opened to Mr. Baxcombe. He proceeded at once to Kensington, and, kneeling by his wife's bed, compensated for all the days of misery and waiting. His protestations of belief in her innocence brought blushes to her cheeks.

Upon hearing of his brother's good fortune, the Earl set aside property yielding an annual income of five thousand pounds, and with part of this Mr. Baxcombe purchased an estate in Dorchester, where he had as neighbors Lady and Mr. O'Brien and Mr. Morton Pitt, cousin of the ex-premier. This estate he named "Brun House," in remembrance of the kindness shown him by the artist. Madame often visited there, which, as she expressed it, was proof incontrovertible of her love, since England was the worst place of residence in the world, only relieved by the spot she fondly called "Durcheestaire."

For his share in the case of "The Crown *vs.* Baxcombe," Sir Collyn Temple was rewarded in pounds, according to the circulars sown broadcast at the time, and in the unfluctuating currency of public odium and contempt. He

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died, unwept because unloved, in Naples,  
March 19, 1831.

As the years sped by, Mr. Baxcombe gained both repute and wealth in his chosen art. Only yesterday, his "Lady in Black, with Hound," sold under the hammer in London for £17,370; but there is one picture of his that money cannot buy. It stands at the head of the grand staircase at Baxcombe Hall and bears the inscription:

COUNTESS TWEEDDALE  
WIFE OF DONALD CURRIE BAXCOMBE, EARL OF  
TWEEDDALE

It is a replica and a work of love.

THE END



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